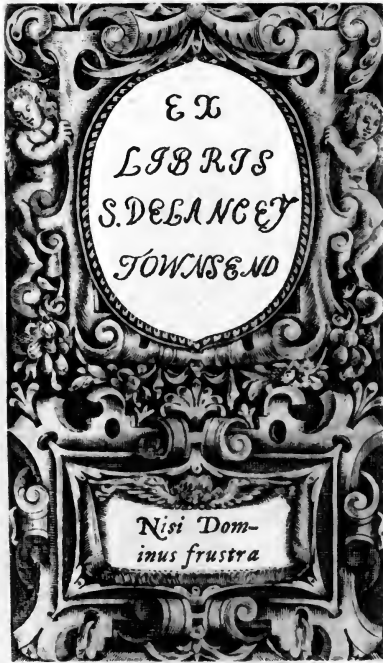


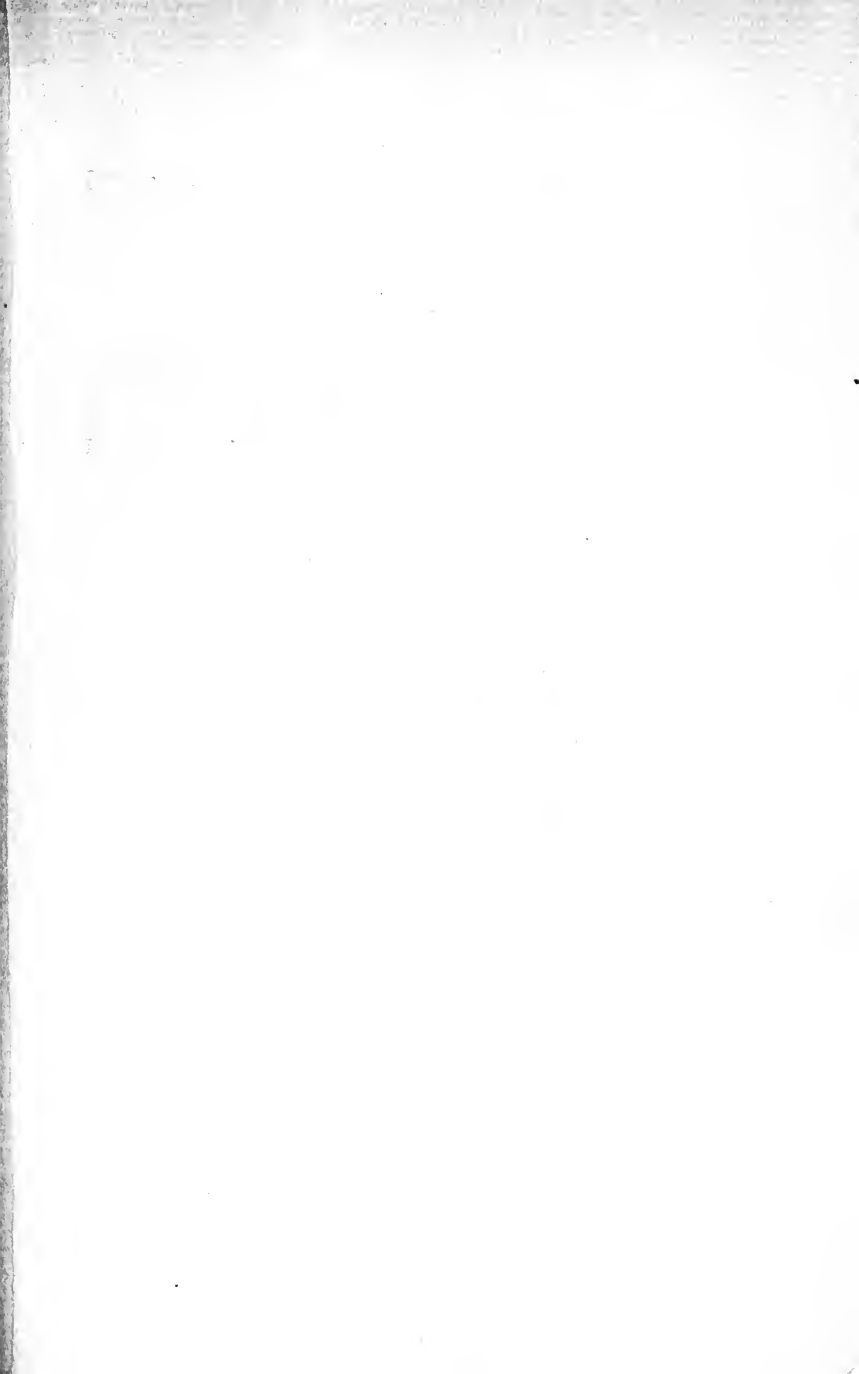
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Portrait Edition

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# English Men of Letters

EDITED BY

JOHN MORLEY

XII.

THACKERAY. BY ANTHONY TROLLOPE

ADDISON. BY W. J. COURTHOPE

SHERIDAN. BY MRS. OLIPHANT



HARPER & BROTHERS PUBLISHERS

1894

# ENGLISH MEN OF LETTERS.

EDITED BY JOHN MORLEY.

## Portrait Edition.

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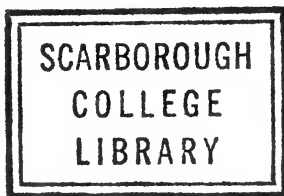
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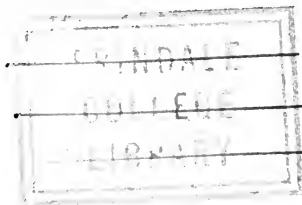
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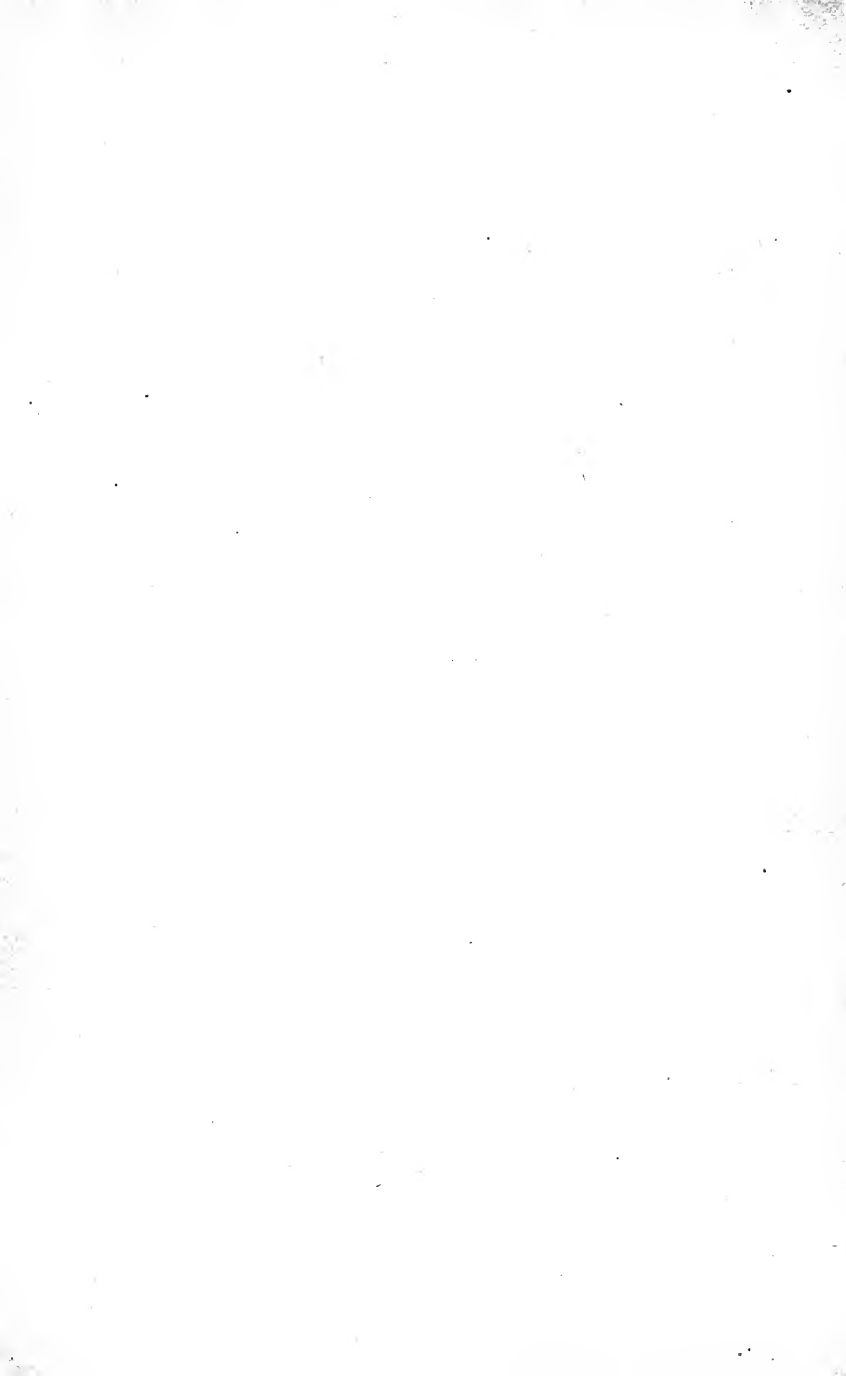
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# THACKERAY

BY

ANTHONY TROLLOPE





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# THACKERAY.

## CHAPTER I.

### BIOGRAPHICAL.

IN the foregoing volumes of this series of *English Men of Letters*, and in other works of a similar nature which have appeared lately as to the *Ancient Classics* and *Foreign Classics*, biography has naturally been, if not the leading, at any rate a considerable element. The desire is common to all readers to know not only what a great writer has written, but also of what nature has been the man who has produced such great work. As to all the authors taken in hand before, there has been extant some written record of the man's life. Biographical details have been more or less known to the world, so that, whether of a Cicero, or of a Goethe, or of our own Johnson, there has been a story to tell. Of Thackeray no life has been written; and though they who knew him — and possibly many who did not — are conversant with anecdotes of the man, who was one so well known in society as to have created many anecdotes, yet there has been no memoir of his life sufficient to supply the wants of even so small a work as this purports to be. For this the reason

may simply be told. Thackeray, not long before his death, had had his taste offended by some fulsome biography. Paragraphs, of which the eulogy seemed to have been the produce rather of personal love than of inquiry or judgment, disgusted him, and he begged of his girls that when he should have gone there should nothing of the sort be done with his name.

We can imagine how his mind had worked, how he had declared to himself that, as by those loving hands into which his letters, his notes, his little details—his literary remains, as such documents used to be called—might naturally fall, truth of his foibles and of his shortcomings could not be told, so should not his praises be written, or that flattering portrait be limned which biographers are wont to produce. Acting upon these instructions, his daughters—while there were two living, and since that the one surviving—have carried out the order which has appeared to them to be sacred. Such being the case, it certainly is not my purpose now to write what may be called a life of Thackeray. In this preliminary chapter I will give such incidents and anecdotes of his life as will tell the reader perhaps all about him that a reader is entitled to ask. I will tell how he became an author, and will say how first he worked and struggled, and then how he worked and prospered, and became a household word in English literature; how, in this way, he passed through that course of mingled failure and success which, though the literary aspirant may suffer, is probably better both for the writer and for the writings than unclouded early glory. The suffering, no doubt, is acute, and a touch of melancholy, perhaps of indignation, may be given to words which have been written while the heart has been too full of its own wrongs; but this is better than the continued note of tri-

umph, which is still heard in the final voices of the spoilt child of literature, even when they are losing their music. Then I will tell how Thackeray died, early indeed, but still having done a good life's work. Something of his manner, something of his appearance I can say, something perhaps of his condition of mind; because for some years he was known to me. But of the continual intercourse of himself with the world, and of himself with his own works, I can tell little, because no record of his life has been made public.

William Makepeace Thackeray was born at Calcutta, on July 18, 1811. His father was Richmond Thackeray, son of W. M. Thackeray of Hadley, near Barnet, in Middlesex. A relation of his, of the same name, a Rev. Mr. Thackeray, I knew well as rector of Hadley, many years afterwards. Him I believe to have been a second cousin of our Thackeray, but I think they had never met each other. Another cousin was Provost of Kings at Cambridge, fifty years ago, as Cambridge men will remember. Clergymen of the family have been numerous in England during the century; and there was one, a Rev. Elias Thackeray, whom I also knew in my youth, a dignitary, if I remember right, in the diocese of Meath. The Thackerays seem to have affected the Church; but such was not at any period of his life the bias of our novelist's mind.

His father and grandfather were Indian civil servants. His mother was Anne Becher, whose father was also in the Company's service. She married early in India, and was only nineteen when her son was born. She was left a widow in 1816, with only one child, and was married a few years afterwards to Major Henry Carmichael Smyth, with whom Thackeray lived on terms of affectionate intercourse till the major died. All who knew William Make

peace remember his mother well, a handsome, spare, gray-haired lady, whom Thackeray treated with a courtly deference as well as constant affection. There was, however, something of discrepancy between them as to matters of religion. Mrs. Carmichael Smyth was disposed to the somewhat austere observance of the evangelical section of the Church. Such, certainly, never became the case with her son. There was disagreement on the subject, and probably unhappiness at intervals, but never, I think, quarrelling. Thackeray's house was his mother's home whenever she pleased it, and the home also of his stepfather.

He was brought a child from India, and was sent early to the Charter House. Of his life and doings there his friend and school-fellow George Venables writes to me as follows:

“ My recollection of him, though fresh enough, does not furnish much material for biography. He came to school young — a pretty, gentle, and rather timid boy. I think his experience there was not generally pleasant. Though he had afterwards a scholarlike knowledge of Latin, he did not attain distinction in the school; and I should think that the character of the head-master, Dr. Russell, which was vigorous, unsympathetic, and stern, though not severe, was uncongenial to his own. With the boys who knew him, Thackeray was popular; but he had no skill in games, and, I think, no taste for them. . . . He was already known by his faculty of making verses, chiefly parodies. I only remember one line of one parody on a poem of L. E. L.'s, about 'Violets, dark blue violets;' Thackeray's version was 'Cabbages, bright green cabbages,' and we thought it very witty. He took part in a scheme, which came to nothing, for a school magazine, and he wrote verses for it, of which I only remember that they were good of their



kind. When I knew him better, in later years, I thought I could recognize the sensitive nature which he had as a boy. . . . His change of retrospective feeling about his school days was very characteristic. In his earlier books he always spoke of the Charter House as Slaughter House and Smithfield. As he became famous and prosperous his memory softened, and Slaughter House was changed into Grey Friars, where Colonel Newcome ended his life."

In February, 1829, when he was not as yet eighteen, Thackeray went up to Trinity College, Cambridge, and was, I think, removed in 1830. It may be presumed, therefore, that his studies there were not very serviceable to him. There are few, if any, records left of his doings at the university—unless it be the fact that he did there commence the literary work of his life. The line about the cabbages, and the scheme of the school magazine, can hardly be said to have amounted even to a commencement. In 1829 a little periodical was brought out at Cambridge, called *The Snob*, with an assurance on the title that it was *not* conducted by members of the university. It is presumed that Thackeray took a hand in editing this. He certainly wrote, and published in the little paper, some burlesque lines on the subject which was given for the Chancellor's prize poem of the year. This was *Timbuctoo*, and Tennyson was the victor on the occasion. There is some good fun in the four first and four last lines of Thackeray's production.

In Africa—3 quarter of the world—  
Men's skins are black; their hair is crisped and curled;  
And somewhere there, unknown to public view,  
A mighty city lies, called Timbuctoo.

\* \* \* \* \*

I see her tribes the hill of glory mount,  
 And sell their sugars on their own account;  
 While round her throne the prostrate nations come,  
 Sue for her rice, and barter for her rum.

I cannot find in *The Snob* internal evidence of much literary merit beyond this. But then how many great writers have there been from whose early lucubrations no future literary excellence could be prognosticated?

There is something at any rate in the name of the publication which tells of work that did come. Thackeray's mind was at all times peculiarly exercised with a sense of snobbishness. His appreciation of the vice grew abnormally, so that at last he had a morbid horror of a snob—a morbid fear lest this or the other man should turn snob on his hands. It is probable that the idea was taken from the early *Snob* at Cambridge, either from his own participation in the work or from his remembrance of it. *The Snob* lived, I think, but nine weeks, and was followed at an interval, in 1830, by *The Gownsmen*, which lived to the seventeenth number, and at the opening of which Thackeray no doubt had a hand. It professed to be a continuation of *The Snob*. It contains a dedication to all proctors, which I should not be sorry to attribute to him. "To all Proctors, past, present, and future—

Whose taste it is our privilege to follow,  
 Whose virtue it is our duty to imitate,  
 Whose presence it is our interest to avoid."

There is, however, nothing beyond fancy to induce me to believe that Thackeray was the author of the dedication, and I do not know that there is any evidence to show that he was connected with *The Snob* beyond the writing of *Timbuctoo*.

In 1830 he left Cambridge, and went to Weimar either in that year or in 1831. Between Weimar and Paris he spent some portion of his earlier years, while his family—his mother, that is, and his stepfather—were living in Devonshire. It was then the purport of his life to become an artist, and he studied drawing at Paris, affecting especially Bonnington, the young English artist who had himself painted at Paris, and who had died in 1828. He never learned to draw—perhaps never could have learned. That he was idle, and did not do his best, we may take for granted. He was always idle, and only on some occasions, when the spirit moved him thoroughly, did he do his best even in after-life. But with drawing—or rather without it—he did wonderfully well even when he did his worst. He did illustrate his own books, and everyone knows how incorrect were his delineations. But as illustrations they were excellent. How often have I wished that characters of my own creating, might be sketched as faultily, if with the same appreciation of the intended purpose. Let anyone look at the “plates,” as they are called in *Vanity Fair*, and compare each with the scenes and the characters intended to be displayed, and there see whether the artist—if we may call him so—has not managed to convey in the picture the exact feeling which he has described in the text. I have a little sketch of his, in which a cannon-ball is supposed to have just carried off the head of an aide-de-camp—messenger I had perhaps better say, lest I might affront military feelings—who is kneeling on the field of battle and delivering a despatch to Marlborough on horseback. The graceful ease with which the duke receives the message though the messenger's head be gone, and the soldier-like precision with which the headless hero finishes his last effort of military

obedience, may not have been portrayed with well-drawn figures, but no finished illustration ever told its story better. Dickens has informed us that he first met Thackeray in 1835, on which occasion the young artist aspirant, looking no doubt after profitable employment, "proposed to become the illustrator of my earliest book." It is singular that such should have been the first interview between the two great novelists. We may presume that the offer was rejected.

In 1832, Thackeray came of age, and inherited his fortune—as to which various stories have been told. It seems to have amounted to about five hundred a year, and to have passed through his hands in a year or two, interest and principal. It has been told of him that it was all taken away from him at cards, but such was not the truth. Some went in an Indian bank in which he invested it. A portion was lost at cards. But with some of it—the larger part, as I think—he endeavoured, in concert with his stepfather, to float a newspaper, which failed. There seem to have been two newspapers in which he was so concerned, *The National Standard* and *The Constitutional*. On the latter he was engaged with his stepfather, and in carrying that on he lost the last of his money. *The National Standard* had been running for some weeks when Thackeray joined it, and lost his money in it. It ran only for little more than twelve months, and then, the money having gone, the periodical came to an end. I know no road to fortune more tempting to a young man, or one that with more certainty leads to ruin. Thackeray, who in a way more or less correct, often refers in his writings, if not to the incidents, at any rate to the remembrances of his own life, tells us much of the story of this newspaper in *Lovel the Widower*. "They are welcome," says the bach-

elor, "to make merry at my charges in respect of a certain bargain which I made on coming to London, and in which, had I been Moses Primrose purchasing green spectacles, I could scarcely have been more taken in. My Jenkinson was an old college acquaintance, whom I was idiot enough to imagine a respectable man. The fellow had a very smooth tongue and sleek sanctified exterior. He was rather a popular preacher, and used to cry a good deal in the pulpit. He and a queer wine-merchant and bill discounter, Sherrick by name, had somehow got possession of that neat little literary paper, *The Museum*, which perhaps you remember, and this eligible literary property my friend Honeyman, with his wheedling tongue, induced me to purchase." Here is the history of Thackeray's money, told by himself plainly enough, but with no intention on his part of narrating an incident in his own life to the public. But the drollery of the circumstances, his own mingled folly and young ambition, struck him as being worth narration, and the more forcibly as he remembered all the ins and outs of his own reflections at the time—how he had meant to enchant the world, and make his fortune. There was literary capital in it of which he could make use after so many years. Then he tells us of this ambition, and of the folly of it; and at the same time puts forward the excuses to be made for it. "I daresay I gave myself airs as editor of that confounded *Museum*, and proposed to educate the public taste, to diffuse morality and sound literature throughout the nation, and to pocket a liberal salary in return for my services. I daresay I printed my own sonnets, my own tragedy, my own verses. . . . I daresay I wrote satirical articles. . . . I daresay I made a gaby of myself to the world. Pray, my good friend, hast thou never done likewise? If thou hast never been a fool, be

sure thou wilt never be a wise man." Thackeray was quite aware of his early weaknesses, and in the maturity of life knew well that he had not been precociously wise. He delighted so to tell his friends, and he delighted also to tell the public, not meaning that any but an inner circle should know that he was speaking of himself. But the story now is plain to all who can read.<sup>1</sup>

It was thus that he lost his money; and then, not having prospered very well with his drawing lessons in Paris or elsewhere, he was fain to take up literature as a profession. It is a business which has its allurements. It requires no capital, no special education, no training, and may be taken up at any time without a moment's delay. If a man can command a table, a chair, a pen, paper, and ink, he can commence his trade as literary man. It is thus that aspirants generally do commence it. A man may or may not have another employment to back him, or means of his own; or—as was the case with Thackeray, when, after his first misadventure, he had to look about him for the means of living—he may have nothing but his intellect and his friends. But the idea comes to the man that as he has the pen and ink, and time on his hand, why should he not write and make money?

It is an idea that comes to very many men and women, old as well as young—to many thousands who at last are crushed by it, of whom the world knows nothing. A man

<sup>1</sup> The report that he had lost all his money and was going to live by painting in Paris, was still prevalent in London in 1836. Macready, on the 27th April of that year, says in his *Diary*: "At Garrick Club, where I dined and saw the papers. Met Thackeray, who has spent all his fortune, and is now about to settle in Paris, I believe as an artist." But at this time he was, in truth, turning to literature as a profession.

can make the attempt though he has not a coat fit to go out into the street with; or a woman, though she be almost in rags. There is no apprenticeship wanted. Indeed, there is no room for such apprenticeship. It is an art which no one teaches; there is no professor who, in a dozen lessons, even pretends to show the aspirant how to write a book or an article. If you would be a watchmaker, you must learn; or a lawyer, a cook, or even a housemaid. Before you can clean a horse you must go into the stable, and begin at the beginning. Even the cab-driving tiro must sit for awhile on the box, and learn something of the streets, before he can ply for a fare. But the literary beginner rushes at once at the top rung of his ladder—as though a youth, having made up his mind to be a clergyman, should demand, without preliminary steps, to be appointed Bishop of London. That he should be able to read and write is presumed, and that only. So much may be presumed of everyone, and nothing more is wanted.

In truth nothing more is wanted—except those inner lights as to which so many men live and die without having learned whether they possess them or not. Practice, industry, study of literature, cultivation of taste, and the rest, will of course lend their aid, will probably be necessary before high excellence is attained. But the instances are not to seek—are at the fingers of us all—in which the first uninstructed effort has succeeded. A boy, almost, or perhaps an old woman, has sat down and the book has come, and the world has read it, and the booksellers have been civil and have written their cheques. When all trades, all professions, all seats at offices, all employments at which a crust can be earned, are so crowded that a young man knows not where to look for the means of livelihood, is there not an attraction in this which to the self

confident must be almost invincible? The booksellers are courteous and write their cheques, but that is not half the whole? *Monstrari digito!* That is obtained. The happy aspirant is written of in newspapers, or, perhaps, better still, he writes of others. When the barrister of forty-five has hardly got a name beyond Chancery Lane, this glorious young scribe, with the first down on his lips, has printed his novel and been talked about.

The temptation is irresistible, and thousands fall into it. How is a man to know that he is not the lucky one or the gifted one? There is the table, and there the pen and ink. Among the unfortunate, he who fails altogether and from the first start is not the most unfortunate. A short period of life is wasted, and a sharp pang is endured. Then the disappointed one is relegated to the condition of life which he would otherwise have filled a little earlier. He has been wounded, but not killed, or even maimed. But he who has a little success, who succeeds in earning a few halcyon, but ah! so dangerous guineas, is drawn into a trade from which he will hardly escape till he be driven from it, if he come out alive, by sheer hunger. He hangs on till the guineas become crowns and shillings—till some sad record of his life, made when he applies for charity, declares that he has worked hard for the last year or two, and has earned less than a policeman in the streets or a porter at a railway. It is to that that he is brought by applying himself to a business which requires only a table and chair, with pen, ink, and paper! It is to that which he is brought by venturing to believe that he has been gifted with powers of imagination, creation, and expression.

The young man who makes the attempt knows that he must run the chance. He is well aware that nine must



fail where one will make his running good. So much as that does reach his ears, and recommends itself to his common-sense. But why should it not be he as well as another? There is always some lucky one winning the prize. And this prize when it has been won is so well worth the winning! He can endure starvation—so he tells himself—as well as another. He will try. But yet he knows that he has but one chance out of ten in his favour, and it is only in his happier moments that he flatters himself that that remains to him. Then there falls upon him—in the midst of that labour which for its success especially requires that a man's heart shall be light, and that he be always at his best—doubt and despair. If there be no chance, of what use is his labor?

Were it not better done as others use,  
To sport with Amaryllis in the shade,

and amuse himself after that fashion? Thus the very industry which alone could give him a chance is discarded. It is so that the young man feels who, with some slight belief in himself and with many doubts, sits down to commence the literary labor by which he hopes to live.

So it was, no doubt, with Thackeray. Such were his hopes and his fears—with a resolution of which we can well understand that it should have waned at times, of earning his bread, if he did not make his fortune, in the world of literature. One has not to look far for evidence of the condition I have described—that it was so, Amaryllis and all. How or when he made his very first attempt in London, I have not learned; but he had not probably spent his money without forming "press" acquaintances, and had thus formed an aperture for the thin end of the wedge. He wrote for *The Constitutional*, of which he

was part proprietor, beginning his work for that paper as a correspondent from Paris. For awhile he was connected with *The Times* newspaper, though his work there did not, I think, amount to much. His first regular employment was on *Fraser's Magazine*, when Mr. Fraser's shop was in Regent Street, when Oliver Yorke was the presumed editor, and among contributors, Carlyle was one of the most notable. I imagine that the battle of life was difficult enough with him even after he had become one of the leading props of that magazine. All that he wrote was not taken, and all that was taken was not approved. In 1837-38, the *History of Samuel Titmarsh and the Great Hoggarty Diamond* appeared in the magazine. The *Great Hoggarty Diamond* is now known to all readers of Thackeray's works. It is not my purpose to speak specially of it here, except to assert that it has been thought to be a great success. When it was being brought out, the author told a friend of his—and of mine—that it was not much thought of at Fraser's, and that he had been called upon to shorten it. That is an incident disagreeable in its nature to any literary gentleman, and likely to be specially so when he knows that his provision of bread, certainly of improved bread and butter, is at stake. The man who thus darkens his literary brow with the frown of disapproval, has at his disposal all the loaves and all the fishes that are going. If the writer be successful, there will come a time when he will be above such frowns; but, when that opinion went forth, Thackeray had not yet made his footing good, and the notice to him respecting it must have been very bitter. It was in writing this *Hoggarty Diamond* that Thackeray first invented the name of Michael Angelo Titmarsh. Samuel Titmarsh was the writer, whereas Michael Angelo was an intending illustra-

tor. Thackeray's nose had been broken in a school fight, while he was quite a little boy, by another little boy, at the Charter House; and there was probably some association intended to be jocose with the name of the great artist, whose nose was broken by his fellow-student Torrignano, and who, as it happened, died exactly three centuries before Thackeray.

I can understand all the disquietude of his heart when that warning, as to the too great length of his story, was given to him. He was not a man capable of feeling at any time quite assured in his position, and when that occurred he was very far from assurance. I think that at no time did he doubt the sufficiency of his own mental qualification for the work he had taken in hand; but he doubted all else. He doubted the appreciation of the world; he doubted his fitness for turning his intellect to valuable account; he doubted his physical capacity—dreading his own lack of industry; he doubted his luck; he doubted the continual absence of some of those misfortunes on which the works of literary men are shipwrecked. Though he was aware of his own power, he always, to the last, was afraid that his own deficiencies should be too strong against him. It was his nature to be idle—to put off his work—and then to be angry with himself for putting it off. Ginger was hot in the mouth with him, and all the allurements of the world were strong upon him. To find on Monday morning an excuse why he should not on Monday do Monday's work was, at the time, an inexpressible relief to him, but had become a deep regret—almost a remorse—before the Monday was over. To such a one it was not given to believe in himself with that sturdy rock-bound foundation which we see to have belonged to some men from the earliest struggles of their

career. To him, then, must have come an inexpressible pang when he was told that his story must be curtailed.

Who else would have told such a story of himself to the first acquaintance he chanced to meet? Of Thackeray it might be predicted that he certainly would do so. No little wound of the kind ever came to him but what he disclosed it at once. "They have only bought so many of my new book." "Have you seen the abuse of my last number?" "What am I to turn my hand to? They are getting tired of my novels." "They don't read it," he said to me of *Esmond*. "So you don't mean to publish my work?" he said once to a publisher in an open company. Other men keep their little troubles to themselves. I have heard even of authors who have declared how all the publishers were running after their books; I have heard some discourse freely of their fourth and fifth editions; I have known an author to boast of his thousands sold in this country, and his tens of thousands in America; but I never heard anyone else declare that no one would read his *chef-d'œuvre*, and that the world was becoming tired of him. It was he who said, when he was fifty, that a man past fifty should never write a novel.

And yet, as I have said, he was from an early age fully conscious of his own ability. That he was so is to be seen in the handling of many of his early works—in *Barry Lyndon*, for instance, and the *Memoirs of Mr. C. James Yellowplush*. The sound is too certain for doubt of that kind. But he had not then, nor did he ever achieve that assurance of public favour which makes a man confident that his work will be successful. During the years of which we are now speaking Thackeray was a literary Bohemian in this sense—that he never regarded his own status as certain. While performing much of the best

of his life's work he was not sure of his market, not certain of his readers, his publishers, or his price; nor was he certain of himself.

It is impossible not to form some contrast between him and Dickens as to this period of his life—a comparison not as to their literary merits, but literary position. Dickens was one year his junior in age, and at this time, viz., 1837–38, had reached almost the zenith of his reputation. *Pickwick* had been published, and *Oliver Twist* and *Nicholas Nickleby* were being published. All the world was talking about the young author who was assuming his position with a confidence in his own powers which was fully justified both by his present and future success. It was manifest that he could make, not only his own fortune, but that of his publishers, and that he was a literary hero bound to be worshipped by all literary grades of men, down to the “devils” of the printing-office. At that time Thackeray, the older man, was still doubting, still hesitating, still struggling. Everyone then had accepted the name of Charles Dickens. That of William Thackeray was hardly known beyond the circle of those who are careful to make themselves acquainted with such matters. It was then the custom, more generally than it is at present, to maintain anonymous writing in magazines. Now, if anything of special merit be brought out, the name of the author, if not published, is known. It was much less so at the period in question; and as the world of readers began to be acquainted with Jeames Yellowplush, Catherine Hayes, and other heroes and heroines, the names of the author had to be inquired for. I remember myself, when I was already well acquainted with the immortal Jeames, asking who was the writer. The works of Charles Dickens were at that time as well known to be his,

and as widely read in England, as those almost of Shakespeare.

It will be said, of course, that this came from the earlier popularity of Dickens. That is of course; but why should it have been so? They had begun to make their effort much at the same time; and if there was any advantage in point of position as they commenced, it was with Thackeray. It might be said that the genius of the one was brighter than that of the other, or, at any rate, that it was more precocious. But after-judgment has, I think, not declared either of the suggestions to be true. I will make no comparison between two such rivals, who were so distinctly different from each, and each of whom, within so very short a period, has come to stand on a pedestal so high—the two exalted to so equal a vocation. And if Dickens showed the best of his power early in life, so did Thackeray the best of his intellect. In no display of mental force did he rise above *Barry Lyndon*. I hardly know how the teller of a narrative shall hope to mount in simply intellectual faculty above the effort there made. In what, then, was the difference? Why was Dickens already a great man when Thackeray was still a literary Bohemian?

The answer is to be found not in the extent or in the nature of the genius of either man, but in the condition of mind—which indeed may be read plainly in their works by those who have eyes to see. The one was steadfast, industrious, full of purpose, never doubting of himself, always putting his best foot foremost and standing firmly on it when he got it there; with no inward trepidation, with no moments in which he was half inclined to think that this race was not for his winning, this goal not to be reached by his struggles. The sympathy of friends

was good to him, but he could have done without it. The good opinion which he had of himself was never shaken by adverse criticism; and the criticism on the other side, by which it was exalted, came from the enumeration of the number of copies sold. He was a firm, reliant man, very little prone to change, who, when he had discovered the nature of his own talent, knew how to do the very best with it.

It may almost be said that Thackeray was the very opposite of this. Unsteadfast, idle, changeable of purpose, aware of his own intellect but not trusting it, no man ever failed more generally than he to put his best foot foremost. Full as his works are of pathos, full of humour, full of love and charity, tending, as they always do, to truth and honour, and manly worth and womanly modesty, excelling, as they seem to me to do, most other written precepts that I know, they always seem to lack something that might have been there. There is a touch of vagueness which indicates that his pen was not firm while he was using it. He seems to me to have been dreaming ever of some high flight, and then to have told himself, with a half-broken heart, that it was beyond his power to soar up into those bright regions. I can fancy, as the sheets went from him every day, he told himself, in regard to every sheet, that it was a failure. Dickens was quite sure of his sheets.

“I have got to make it shorter!” Then he would put his hands in his pockets, and stretch himself, and straighten the lines of his face, over which a smile would come, as though this intimation from his editor were the best joke in the world; and he would walk away, with his heart bleeding, and every nerve in an agony. There are none of us who want to have much of his work shortened now.

In 1837 Thackeray married Isabella, daughter of Colonel Matthew Shawe, and from this union there came three daughters, Anne, Jane, and Harriet. The name of the eldest, now Mrs. Richmond Ritchie, who has followed so closely in her father's steps, is a household word to the world of novel readers; the second died as a child; the younger lived to marry Leslie Stephen, who is too well known for me to say more than that he wrote, the other day, the little volume on Dr. Johnson in this series; but she, too, has now followed her father. Of Thackeray's married life what need be said shall be contained in a very few words. It was grievously unhappy; but the misery of it came from God, and was in no wise due to human fault. She became ill, and her mind failed her. There was a period during which he would not believe that her illness was more than illness, and then he clung to her and waited on her with an assiduity of affection which only made his task the more painful to him. At last it became evident that she should live in the companionship of some one with whom her life might be altogether quiet, and she has since been domiciled with a lady with whom she has been happy. Thus she was, after but a few years of married life, taken away from him, and he became, as it were, a widower till the end of his days.

At this period, and indeed for some years after his marriage, his chief literary dependence was on *Fraser's Magazine*. He wrote also at this time in the *New Monthly Magazine*. In 1840 he brought out his *Paris Sketch Book*, as to which he tells us, by a notice printed with the first edition, that half of the sketches had already been published in various periodicals. Here he used the name Michael Angelo Titmarsh, as he did also with the *Journey from Cornhill to Cairo*. Dickens had called himself Boz,



and clung to the name with persistency as long as the public would permit it. Thackeray's affection for assumed names was more intermittent, though I doubt whether he used his own name altogether till it appeared on the title-page of *Vanity Fair*. About this time began his connection with *Punch*, in which much of his best work appeared. Looking back at our old friend as he used to come out from week to week at this time, we can hardly boast that we used to recognise how good the literary pabulum was that was then given for our consumption. We have to admit that the ordinary reader, as the ordinary picture-seer, requires to be guided by a name. We are moved to absolute admiration by a Raphael or a Hobbema, but hardly till we have learned the name of the painter, or, at any rate, the manner of his painting. I am not sure that all lovers of poetry would recognise a *Lycidas* coming from some hitherto unknown Milton. Gradually the good picture or the fine poem makes its way into the minds of a slowly discerning public. *Punch*, no doubt, became very popular, owing, perhaps, more to Leech, its artist, than to any other single person. Gradually the world of readers began to know that there was a speciality of humour to be found in its pages—fun and sense, satire and good-humour, compressed together in small literary morsels as the nature of its columns required. Gradually the name of Thackeray as one of the band of brethren was buzzed about, and gradually became known as that of the chief of the literary brothers. But during the years in which he did much for *Punch*, say from 1843 to 1853, he was still struggling to make good his footing in literature. They knew him well in the *Punch* office, and no doubt the amount and regularity of the cheques from Messrs. Bradbury and Evans, the then and still owners of

that happy periodical, made him aware that he had found for himself a satisfactory career. In "a good day for himself, the journal, and the world, Thackeray found *Punch*." This was said by his old friend Shirley Brooks, who himself lived to be editor of the paper and died in harness, and was said most truly. *Punch* was more congenial to him, and no doubt more generous, than *Fraser*. There was still something of the literary Bohemian about him, but not as it had been before. He was still unfixed, looking out for some higher career, not altogether satisfied to be no more than one of an anonymous band of brothers, even though the brothers were the brothers of *Punch*. We can only imagine what were his thoughts as to himself and that other man, who was then known as the great novelist of the day—of a rivalry with whom he was certainly conscious. *Punch* was very much to him, but was not quite enough. That must have been very clear to himself as he meditated the beginning of *Vanity Fair*.

Of the contributions to the periodical, the best known now are *The Snob Papers* and *The Ballads of Policeman X*. But they were very numerous. Of Thackeray as a poet, or maker of verses, I will say a few words in a chapter which will be devoted to his own so-called ballads. Here it seems only necessary to remark that there was not apparently any time in his career at which he began to think seriously of appearing before the public as a poet. Such was the intention early in their career with many of our best known prose writers, with Milton, and Goldsmith, and Samuel Johnson, with Scott, Macaulay, and more lately with Matthew Arnold; writers of verse and prose who ultimately prevailed some in one direction, and others in the other. Milton and Goldsmith have been known best

as poets, Johnson and Macaulay as writers of prose. But with all of them there has been a distinct effort in each art. Thackeray seems to have tumbled into versification by accident; writing it as amateurs do, a little now and again for his own delectation, and to catch the taste of partial friends. The reader feels that Thackeray would not have begun to print his verses unless the opportunity of doing so had been brought in his way by his doings in prose. And yet he had begun to write verses when he was very young;—at Cambridge, as we have seen, when he contributed more to the fame of Timbuctoo than I think even Tennyson has done—and in his early years at Paris. Here again, though he must have felt the strength of his own mingled humour and pathos, he always struck with an uncertain note till he had gathered strength and confidence by popularity. Good as they generally were, his verses were accidents, written not as a writer writes who claims to be a poet, but as though they might have been the relaxation of a doctor or a barrister.

And so they were. When Thackeray first settled himself in London, to make his living among the magazines and newspapers, I do not imagine that he counted much on his poetic powers. He describes it all in his own dialogue between the pen and the album.

“Since he,” says the pen, speaking of its master, Thackeray:

“Since he my faithful service did engage,  
To follow him through his queer pilgrimage,  
I’ve drawn and written many a line and page.

“Caricatures I scribbled have, and rhymes,  
And dinner-cards, and picture pantomimes,  
And many little children’s books at times.

“I’ve writ the foolish fancy of his brain ;  
The aimless jest that, striking, hath caused pain ;  
The idle word that he’d wish back again.

“I’ve helped him to pen many a line for bread.”

It was thus he thought of his work. There had been caricatures, and rhymes, and many little children’s books ; and then the lines written for his bread, which, except that they were written for *Punch*, was hardly undertaken with a more serious purpose. In all of it there was ample seriousness, had he known it himself. What a tale of the restlessness, of the ambition, of the glory, of the misfortunes of a great country is given in the ballads of Peter the French drummer ! Of that brain so full of fancy the pen had lightly written all the fancies. He did not know it when he was doing so, but with that word fancy he has described exactly the gift with which his brain was specially endowed. If a writer be accurate, or sonorous, or witty, or simply pathetic, he may, I think, gauge his own powers. He may do so after experience with something of certainty. But fancy is a gift which the owner of it cannot measure, and the power of which, when he is using it, he cannot himself understand. There is the same lambent flame flickering over everything he did, even the dinner-cards and the picture pantomimes. He did not in the least know what he put into those things. So it was with his verses. It was only by degrees, when he was told of it by others, that he found that they too were of infinite value to him in his profession.

The *Irish Sketch Book* came out in 1843, in which he used, but only half used, the name of Michael Angelo Titmarsh. He dedicates it to Charles Lever, and in signing the dedication gave his own name. “Laying aside,” he

says, "for a moment the travelling title of Mr. Titmarsh, let me acknowledge these favours in my own name, and subscribe myself, &c., &c., W. M. Thackeray." So he gradually fell into the declaration of his own identity. In 1844 he made his journey to Turkey and Egypt—*From Cornhill to Grand Cairo*, as he called it, still using the old *nom de plume*, but again signing the dedication with his own name. It was now made to the captain of the vessel in which he encountered that famous white squall, in describing which he has shown the wonderful power he had over words.

In 1846 was commenced, in numbers, the novel which first made his name well known to the world. This was *Vanity Fair*, a work to which it is evident that he devoted all his mind. Up to this time his writings had consisted of short contributions, chiefly of sketches, each intended to stand by itself in the periodical to which it was sent. *Barry Lyndon* had hitherto been the longest; but that and *Catherine Hays*, and the *Hoggarty Diamond*, though stories continued through various numbers, had not as yet reached the dignity—or at any rate the length—of a three-volume novel. But of late novels had grown to be much longer than those of the old well-known measure. Dickens had stretched his to nearly double the length, and had published them in twenty numbers. The attempt had caught the public taste, and had been pre-eminently successful. The nature of the tale as originated by him was altogether unlike that to which the readers of modern novels had been used. No plot, with an arranged catastrophe or *dénoûment*, was necessary. Some untying of the various knots of the narrative no doubt were expedient, but these were of the simplest kind, done with the view of giving an end to that which might otherwise be

endless. The adventures of a *Pickwick* or a *Nickleby* required very little of a plot, and this mode of telling a story, which might be continued on through any number of pages, as long as the characters were interesting, met with approval. Thackeray, who had never depended much on his plot in the shorter tales which he had hitherto told, determined to adopt the same form in his first great work but with these changes:—That as the central character with Dickens had always been made beautiful with unnatural virtue—for who was ever so unselfish as *Pickwick*, so manly and modest as *Nicholas*, or so good a boy as *Oli-ver?*—so should his centre of interest be in every respect abnormally bad.

As to Thackeray's reason for this—or rather as to that condition of mind which brought about this result—I will say something in a final chapter, in which I will endeavor to describe the nature and effect of his work generally. Here it will be necessary only to declare that, such was the choice he now made of a subject in his first attempt to rise out of a world of small literary contributions, into the more assured position of the author of a work of importance. We are aware that the monthly nurses of periodical literature did not at first smile on the effort. The proprietors of magazines did not see their way to undertake *Vanity Fair*, and the publishers are said to have generally looked shy upon it. At last it was brought out in numbers—twenty-four numbers instead of twenty, as with those by Dickens—under the guardian hands of Messrs. Bradbury and Evans. This was completed in 1848, and then it was that, at the age of thirty-seven, Thackeray first achieved for himself a name and reputation through the country. Before this he had been known at *Fraser's* and at the *Punch* office. He was

known at the Garrick Club, and had become individually popular among literary men in London. He had made many fast friends, and had been, as it were, found out by persons of distinction. But Jones, and Smith, and Robinson, in Liverpool, Manchester, and Birmingham, did not know him as they knew Dickens, Carlyle, Tennyson, and Macaulay—not as they knew Landseer, or Stansfeld, or Turner; not as they knew Macready, Charles Kean, or Miss Faucit. In that year, 1848, his name became common in the memoirs of the time. On the 5th of June I find him dining with Macready, to meet Sir J. Wilson, Panizzi, Landseer, and others. A few days afterwards Macready dined with him. “Dined with Thackeray, met the Gordons, Kenyons, Procters, Reeve, Villiers, Evans, Stansfeld, and saw Mrs. Sartoris and S. C. Dance, White, H. Goldsmid, in the evening.” Again: “Dined with Forster, having called and taken up Brookfield, met Rintoul, Kenyon, Procter, Kinglake, Alfred Tennyson, Thackeray.” Macready was very accurate in jotting down the names of those he entertained, who entertained him, or were entertained with him. *Vanity Fair* was coming out, and Thackeray had become one of the personages in literary society. In the January number of 1848 the *Edinburgh Review* had an article on Thackeray’s works generally as they were then known. It purports to combine the *Irish Sketch Book*, the *Journey from Cornhill to Grand Cairo*, and *Vanity Fair* as far as it had then gone; but it does in truth deal chiefly with the literary merits of the latter. I will quote a passage from the article, as proving in regard to Thackeray’s work an opinion which was well founded, and as telling the story of his life as far as it was then known:

“Full many a valuable truth,” says the reviewer, “has

been sent undulating through the air by men who have lived and died unknown. At this moment the rising generation are supplied with the best of their mental aliment by writers whose names are a dead letter to the mass; and among the most remarkable of these is Michael Angelo Titmarsh, alias William Makepeace Thackeray, author of the *Irish Sketch Book*, of *A Journey from Cornhill to Grand Cairo*, of *Jeames's Diary*, of *The Snob Papers* in *Punch*, of *Vanity Fair*, &c., &c.

“Mr. Thackeray is now about thirty-seven years of age, of a good family, and originally intended for the bar. He kept seven or eight terms at Cambridge, but left the university without taking a degree, with the view of becoming an artist; and we well remember, ten or twelve years ago, finding him day after day engaged in copying pictures in the Louvre, in order to qualify himself for his intended profession. It may be doubted, however, whether any degree of assiduity would have enabled him to excel in the money-making branches, for his talent was altogether of the Hogarth kind, and was principally remarkable in the pen-and-ink sketches of character and situation, which he dashed off for the amusement of his friends. At the end of two or three years of desultory application he gave up the notion of becoming a painter, and took to literature. He set up and edited with marked ability a weekly journal, on the plan of *The Athenæum* and *Literary Gazette*, but was unable to compete successfully with such long-established rivals. He then became a regular man of letters—that is, he wrote for respectable magazines and newspapers, until the attention attracted to his contributions in *Fraser's Magazine* and *Punch* emboldened him to start on his own account, and risk an independent publication.” Then follows a eulogistic and,



as I think, a correct criticism on the book as far as it had gone. There are a few remarks perhaps a little less eulogistic as to some of his minor writings, *The Snob Papers* in particular; and at the end there is a statement with which I think we shall all now agree: "A writer with such a pen and pencil as Mr. Thackeray's is an acquisition of real and high value in our literature."

The reviewer has done his work in a tone friendly to the author, whom he knew<sup>1</sup>—as indeed it may be said that this little book will be written with the same feeling—but the public has already recognised the truth of the review generally. There can be no doubt that Thackeray, though he had hitherto been but a contributor of anonymous pieces to periodicals—to what is generally considered as merely the ephemeral literature of the month—had already become effective on the tastes and morals of readers. Affectation of finery; the vulgarity which apes good breeding but never approaches it; dishonest gambling, whether with dice or with railway shares; and that low taste for literary excitement which is gratified by mysterious murders and Old Bailey executions, had already received condign punishment from Yellowplush, Titmarsh, Fitzboodle, and Ikey Solomon. Under all those names Thackeray had plied his trade as a satirist. Though the truths, as the reviewer said, had been merely sent undulating through the air, they had already become effective.

Thackeray had now become a personage—one of the recognised stars of the literary heaven of the day. It was an honour to know him; and we may well believe that the givers of dinners were proud to have him among

<sup>1</sup> The article was written by Abraham Hayward, who is still with us, and was no doubt instigated by a desire to assist Thackeray in his struggle upwards, in which it succeeded.

their guests. He had opened his oyster with his pen—an achievement which he cannot be said to have accomplished until *Vanity Fair* had come out. In inquiring about him from those who survive him, and knew him well in those days, I always hear the same account. “If I could only tell you the impromptu lines which fell from him!” “If I had only kept the drawings from his pen, which used to be chucked about as though they were worth nothing!” “If I could only remember the drolleries!” Had they been kept, there might now be many volumes of these sketches, as to which the reviewer says that their talent was “altogether of the Hogarth kind.” Could there be any kind more valuable? Like Hogarth, he could always make his picture tell his story; though, unlike Hogarth, he had not learned to draw. I have had sent to me for my inspection an album of drawings and letters, which, in the course of twenty years, from 1829 to 1849, were despatched from Thackeray to his old friend Edward Fitzgerald. Looking at the wit displayed in the drawings, I feel inclined to say that had he persisted he would have been a second Hogarth. There is a series of ballet scenes, in which “Flore et Zephyr” are the two chief performers, which for expression and drollery exceed anything that I know of the kind. The set in this book are lithographs, which were published, but I do not remember to have seen them elsewhere. There are still among us many who knew him well—Edward Fitzgerald and George Venables, James Spedding and Kinglake, Mrs. Procter—the widow of Barry Cornwall, who loved him well—and Monckton Milnes, as he used to be, whose touching lines written just after Thackeray’s death will close this volume, Frederick Pollock and Frank Fladgate, John Blackwood and William Russell—and they all tell

the same story. Though he so rarely talked, as good talkers do, and was averse to sit down to work, there were always falling from his mouth and pen those little pearls. Among the friends who had been kindest and dearest to him in the days of his strugglings he once mentioned three to me—Matthew Higgins, or Jacob Omnium, as he was more popularly called; William Stirling, who became Sir William Maxwell; and Russell Sturgis, who is now the senior partner in the great house of Barings. Alas, only the last of these three is left among us! Thackeray was a man of no great power of conversation. I doubt whether he ever shone in what is called general society. He was not a man to be valuable at a dinner-table as a good talker. It was when there were but two or three together that he was happy himself and made others happy; and then it would rather be from some special piece of drollery that the joy of the moment would come, than from the discussion of ordinary topics. After so many years his old friends remember the fag-ends of the doggerel lines which used to drop from him without any effort on all occasions of jollity. And though he could be very sad—laden with melancholy, as I think must have been the case with him always—the feeling of fun would quickly come to him, and the queer rhymes would be poured out as plentifully as the sketches were made. Here is a contribution which I find hanging in the memory of an old friend, the serious nature of whose literary labours would certainly have driven such lines from his mind, had they not at the time caught fast hold of him:

“In the romantic little town of Highbury  
My father kept a circulatin' library;  
He followed in his youth that man immortal, who  
Conquered the Frenchmen on the plains of Waterloo.

Mamma was an inhabitant of Drogheda,  
Very good she was to darn and to embroider.  
In the famous island of Jamaica,  
For thirty years I've been a sugar-baker;  
And here I sit, the Muses' 'appy vot'ry,  
A cultivatin' every kind of po'try."

There may, perhaps, have been a mistake in a line, but the poem has been handed down with fair correctness over a period of forty years. He was always versifying. He once owed me five pounds seventeen shillings and sixpence, his share of a dinner bill at Richmond. He sent me a cheque for the amount in rhyme, giving the proper financial document on the second half of a sheet of note-paper. I gave the poem away as an autograph, and now forget the lines. This was all trifling, the reader will say. No doubt. Thackeray was always trifling, and yet always serious. In attempting to understand his character it is necessary for you to bear within your own mind the idea that he was always, within his own bosom, encountering melancholy with buffoonery, and meanness with satire. The very spirit of burlesque dwelt within him—a spirit which does not see the grand the less because of the travesties which it is always engendering.

In his youthful—all but boyish—days in London; he delighted to “put himself up” at the Bedford, in Covent Garden. Then, in his early married days, he lived in Albion Street, and from thence went to Great Coram Street, till his household there was broken up by his wife's illness. He afterwards took lodgings in St. James's Chambers, and then a house in Young Street, Kensington. Here he lived from 1847, when he was achieving his great triumph with *Vanity Fair*, down to 1853, when he removed to a house which he bought in Onslow Square. In Young Street

there had come to lodge opposite to him an Irish gentleman, who, on the part of his injured country, felt very angry with Thackeray. *The Irish Sketch Book* had not been complimentary, nor were the descriptions which Thackeray had given generally of Irishmen; and there was extant an absurd idea that in his abominable heroine Catherine Hayes he had alluded to Miss Catherine Hayes, the Irish singer. Word was taken to Thackeray that this Irishman intended to come across the street and avenge his country on the calumniator's person. Thackeray immediately called upon the gentleman, and it is said that the visit was pleasant to both parties. There certainly was no blood shed.

He had now succeeded—in 1848—in making for himself a standing as a man of letters, and an income. What was the extent of his income I have no means of saying; nor is it a subject on which, as I think, inquiry should be made. But he was not satisfied with his position. He felt it to be precarious, and he was always thinking of what he owed to his two girls. That *arbitrium popularis auræ* on which he depended for his daily bread was not regarded by him with the confidence which it deserved. He did not, probably, know how firm was the hold he had obtained of the public ear. At any rate he was anxious, and endeavoured to secure for himself a permanent income in the public service. He had become by this time acquainted, probably intimate, with the Marquis of Clanricarde, who was then Postmaster-General. In 1848 there fell a vacancy in the situation of Assistant-Secretary at the General Post-Office, and Lord Clanricarde either offered it to him or promised to give it to him. The Postmaster-General had the disposal of the place, but was not altogether free from control in the matter. When he made

known his purpose at the Post-Office, he was met by an assurance from the officer next under him that the thing could not be done. The services were wanted of a man who had had experience in the Post-Office; and, moreover, it was necessary that the feelings of other gentlemen should be consulted. Men who have been serving in an office many years do not like to see even a man of genius put over their heads. In fact, the office would have been up in arms at such an injustice. Lord Clanricarde, who in a matter of patronage was not scrupulous, was still a good-natured man and amenable. He attempted to befriend his friend till he found that it was impossible, and then, with the best grace in the world, accepted the official nominee that was offered to him.

It may be said that had Thackeray succeeded in that attempt he would surely have ruined himself. No man can be fit for the management and performance of special work who has learned nothing of it before his thirty-seventh year; and no man could have been less so than Thackeray. There are men who, though they be not fit, are disposed to learn their lesson and make themselves as fit as possible. Such cannot be said to have been the case with this man. For the special duties which he would have been called upon to perform, consisting to a great extent of the maintenance of discipline over a large body of men, training is required, and the service would have suffered for awhile under any untried elderly tiro. Another man might have put himself into harness. Thackeray never would have done so. The details of his work after the first month would have been inexpressibly wearisome to him. To have gone into the city, and to have remained there every day from eleven till five, would have been all but impossible to him. He would not have done

it. And then he would have been tormented by the feeling that he was taking the pay and not doing the work. There is a belief current, not confined to a few, that a man may be a Government Secretary with a generous salary, and have nothing to do. The idea is something that remains to us from the old days of sinecures. If there be now remaining places so pleasant, or gentlemen so happy, I do not know them. Thackeray's notion of his future duties was probably very vague. He would have repudiated the notion that he was looking for a sinecure, but no doubt considered that the duties would be easy and light. It is not too much to assert, that he who could drop his pearls as I have said above, throwing them wide cast without an effort, would have found his work as Assistant-Secretary at the General Post-Office to be altogether too much for him. And then it was no doubt his intention to join literature with the Civil Service. He had been taught to regard the Civil Service as easy, and had counted upon himself as able to add it to his novels, and his work with his *Punch* brethren, and to his contributions generally to the literature of the day. He might have done so, could he have risen at five, and have sat at his private desk for three hours before he began his official routine at the public one. A capability for grinding, an aptitude for continuous task work, a disposition to sit in one's chair as though fixed to it by cobbler's wax, will enable a man in the prime of life to go through the tedium of a second day's work every day; but of all men Thackeray was the last to bear the wearisome perseverance of such a life. Some more or less continuous attendance at his office he must have given, and with it would have gone *Punch* and the novels, the ballads, the burlesques, the essays, the lectures, and the monthly papers full of mingled

satire and tenderness, which have left to us that Thackeray which we could so ill afford to lose out of the literature of the nineteenth century. And there would have remained to the Civil Service the memory of a disgraceful job.

He did not, however, give up the idea of the Civil Service. In a letter to his American friend, Mr. Reed, dated 8th November, 1854, he says: "The secretaryship of our Legation at Washington was vacant the other day, and I instantly asked for it; but in the very kindest letter Lord Clarendon showed how the petition was impossible. First, the place was given away. Next, it would not be fair to appoint out of the service. But the first was an excellent reason—not a doubt of it." The validity of the second was probably not so apparent to him as it is to one who has himself waited long for promotion. "So if ever I come," he continues, "as I hope and trust to do this time next year, it must be in my own coat, and not the Queen's." Certainly in his own coat, and not in the Queen's, must Thackeray do anything by which he could mend his fortune or make his reputation. There never was a man less fit for the Queen's coat.

Nevertheless he held strong ideas that much was due by the Queen's ministers to men of letters, and no doubt had his feelings of slighted merit, because no part of the debt due was paid to him. In 1850 he wrote a letter to *The Morning Chronicle*, which has since been republished, in which he alludes to certain opinions which had been put forth in *The Examiner*. "I don't see," he says, "why men of letters should not very cheerfully coincide with Mr. Examiner in accepting all the honours, places, and prizes which they can get. The amount of such as will be awarded to them will not, we may be pretty sure, im-



poverish the country much; and if it is the custom of the State to reward by money, or titles of honour, or stars and garters of any sort, individuals who do the country service—and if individuals are gratified at having ‘Sir’ or ‘My lord’ appended to their names, or stars and ribbons hooked on to their coats and waistcoats, as men most undoubtedly are, and as their wives, families, and relations are—there can be no reason why men of letters should not have the chance, as well as men of the robe or the sword; or why, if honour and money are good for one profession, they should not be good for another. No man in other callings thinks himself degraded by receiving a reward from his Government; nor, surely, need the literary man be more squeamish about pensions, and ribbons, and titles, than the ambassador, or general, or judge. Every European state but ours rewards its men of letters. The American Government gives them their full share of its small patronage; and if Americans, why not Englishmen?”

In this a great subject is discussed which would be too long for these pages; but I think that there now exists a feeling that literature can herself, for herself, produce a rank as effective as any that a Queen’s minister can bestow. Surely it would be a repainting of the lily, an adding a flavour to the rose, a gilding of refined gold to create to-morrow a Lord Viscount Tennyson, a Baron Carlyle, or a Right Honourable Sir Robert Browning. And as for pay and pension, the less the better of it for any profession, unless so far as it may be payment made for work done. Then the higher the payment the better, in literature as in all other trades. It may be doubted even whether a special rank of its own be good for literature, such as that which is achieved by the happy possessors of the forty chairs of the Academy in France. Even though they had

an angel to make the choice—which they have not—that angel would do more harm to the excluded than good to the selected.

*Pendennis*, *Esmond*, and *The Newcomes* followed *Vanity Fair*—not very quickly indeed, always at an interval of two years—in 1850, 1852, and 1854. As I purpose to devote a separate short chapter, or part of a chapter, to each of these, I need say nothing here of their special merits or demerits. *Esmond* was brought out as a whole. The others appeared in numbers. “He lisped in numbers, for the numbers came.” It is a mode of pronunciation in literature by no means very articulate, but easy of production and lucrative. But though easy it is seductive, and leads to idleness. An author by means of it can raise money and reputation on his book before he has written it, and when the pang of parturition is over in regard to one part, he feels himself entitled to a period of ease because the amount required for the next division will occupy him only half the month. This to Thackeray was so alluring that the entirety of the final half was not always given to the task. His self-reproaches and bemoanings when sometimes the day for reappearing would come terribly nigh, while yet the necessary amount of copy was far from being ready, were often very ludicrous and very sad—ludicrous because he never told of his distress without adding to it something of ridicule which was irresistible, and sad because those who loved him best were aware that physical suffering had already fallen upon him, and that he was deterred by illness from the exercise of continuous energy. I myself did not know him till after the time now in question. My acquaintance with him was quite late in his life. But he has told me something of it, and I have heard from those who lived with him.

how continual were his sufferings. In 1854, he says in one of his letters to Mr. Reed—the only private letters of his which I know to have been published: “I am to-day just out of bed after another, about the dozenth, severe fit of spasms which I have had this year. My book would have been written but for them.” His work was always going on, but though not fuller of matter—that would have been almost impossible—would have been better in manner had he been delayed neither by suffering nor by that palsyng of the energies which suffering produces.

This ought to have been the happiest period of his life, and should have been very happy. He had become fairly easy in his circumstances. He had succeeded in his work, and had made for himself a great name. He was fond of popularity, and especially anxious to be loved by a small circle of friends. These good things he had thoroughly achieved. Immediately after the publication of *Vanity Fair* he stood high among the literary heroes of his country, and had endeared himself especially to a special knot of friends. His face and figure, his six feet four in height, with his flowing hair, already nearly gray, and his broken nose, his broad forehead and ample chest, encountered everywhere either love or respect; and his daughters to him were all the world—the bairns of whom he says, at the end of the *White Squall* ballad:

“I thought, as day was breaking,  
My little girls were waking,  
And smiling, and making  
A prayer at home for me.”

Nothing could have been more tender or endearing than his relations with his children. But still there was a

skeleton in his cupboard—or rather two skeletons. His home had been broken up by his wife's malady, and his own health was shattered. When he was writing *Pendennis*, in 1849, he had a severe fever, and then those spasms came, of which four or five years afterwards he wrote to Mr. Reed. His home, as a home should be, was never restored to him—or his health. Just at that period of life at which a man generally makes a happy exchange in taking his wife's drawing-room in lieu of the smoking-room of his club, and assumes those domestic ways of living which are becoming and pleasant for matured years, that drawing-room and those domestic ways were closed against him. The children were then no more than babies, as far as society was concerned—things to kiss and play with, and make a home happy if they could only have had their mother with them. I have no doubt there were those who thought that Thackeray was very jolly under his adversity. Jolly he was. It was the manner of the man to be so—if that continual playfulness which was natural to him, lying over a melancholy which was as continual, be compatible with jollity. He laughed, and ate, and drank, and threw his pearls about with miraculous profusion. But I fancy that he was far from happy. I remember once, when I was young, receiving advice as to the manner in which I had better spend my evenings; I was told that I ought to go home, drink tea, and read good books. It was excellent advice, but I found that the reading of good books in solitude was not an occupation congenial to me. It was so, I take it, with Thackeray. He did not like his lonely drawing-room, and went back to his life among the clubs by no means with contentment.

In 1853, Thackeray having then his own two girls to

provide for, added a third to his family, and adopted Amy Crowe, the daughter of an old friend, and sister of the well-known artist now among us. How it came to pass that she wanted a home, or that this special home suited her, it would be unnecessary here to tell even if I knew. But that he did give a home to this young lady, making her in all respects the same as another daughter, should be told of him. He was a man who liked to broaden his back for the support of others, and to make himself easy under such burdens. In 1862, she married a Thackeray cousin, a young officer with the Victoria Cross, Edward Thackeray, and went out to India, where she died.

In 1854, the year in which *The Newcomes* came out, Thackeray had broken his close alliance with *Punch*. In December of that year there appeared from his pen an article in *The Quarterly* on *John Leech's Pictures of Life and Character*. It is a rambling discourse on picture-illustration in general, full of interest, but hardly good as a criticism—a portion of literary work for which he was not specially fitted. In it he tells us how Richard Doyle, the artist, had given up his work for *Punch*, not having been able, as a Roman Catholic, to endure the skits which, at that time, were appearing in one number after another against what was then called Papal aggression. The reviewer—Thackeray himself—then tells us of the secession of himself from the board of brethren. “Another member of Mr. Punch’s cabinet, the biographer of *Jeames*, the author of *The Snob Papers*, resigned his functions, on account of Mr. Punch’s assaults upon the present Emperor of the French nation, whose anger *Jeames* thought it was unpatriotic to arouse.” How hard it must be for Cabinets to agree! This man or that is sure to have some pet conviction of his own, and the better the man the stronger

the conviction! Then the reviewer went on in favour of the artist of whom he was specially speaking, making a comparison which must at the time have been odious enough to some of the brethren. "There can be no blinking the fact that in Mr. Punch's Cabinet John Leech is the right-hand man. Fancy a number of *Punch* without Leech's pictures! What would you give for it?" Then he breaks out into strong admiration of that one friend—perhaps with a little disregard as to the feelings of other friends.<sup>1</sup> This *Critical Review*, if it may properly be so called—at any rate it is so named as now published—is to be found in our author's collected works, in the same volume with *Catherine*. It is there preceded by another, from *The Westminster Review*, written fourteen years earlier, on *The Genius of Cruikshank*. This contains a descriptive catalogue of Cruikshank's works up to that period, and is interesting, from the piquant style in which it is written. I fancy that these two are the only efforts of the kind which he made—and in both he dealt with the two great caricaturists of his time, he himself being, in the imaginative part of a caricaturist's work, equal in power to either of them.

We now come to a phase of Thackeray's life in which he achieved a remarkable success, attributable rather to his fame as a writer than to any particular excellence in the art which he then exercised. He took upon himself

<sup>1</sup> For a week there existed at the *Punch* office a grudge against Thackeray in reference to this awkward question: "What would you give for your *Punch* without John Leech?" Then he asked the confraternity to dinner—*more Thackerayano*—and the confraternity came. Who can doubt but they were very jolly over the little blunder? For years afterwards Thackeray was a guest at the well-known *Punch* dinner, though he was no longer one of the contributors.

the functions of a lecturer, being moved to do so by a hope that he might thus provide a sum of money for the future sustenance of his children. No doubt he had been advised to this course, though I do not know from whom specially the advice may have come. Dickens had already considered the subject, but had not yet consented to read in public for money on his own account. John Forster, writing of the year 1846, says of Dickens and the then only thought-of exercise of a new profession: "I continued to oppose, for reasons to be stated in their place, that which he had set his heart upon too strongly to abandon, and which I still can wish he had preferred to surrender with all that seemed to be its enormous gain." And again he says, speaking of a proposition which had been made to Dickens from the town of Bradford: "At first this was entertained, but was abandoned, with some reluctance, upon the argument that to become publicly a reader must alter, without improving, his position publicly as a writer, and that it was a change to be justified only when the higher calling should have failed of the old success." The meaning of this was that the money to be made would be sweet, but that the descent to a profession which was considered to be lower than that of literature itself would carry with it something that was bitter. It was as though one who had sat on the Woolsack as Lord Chancellor should raise the question whether, for the sake of the income attached to it, he might, without disgrace, occupy a seat on a lower bench; as though an architect should consider with himself the propriety of making his fortune as a contractor; or the head of a college lower his dignity, while he increased his finances, by taking pupils. When such discussions arise, money generally carries the day—and should do so. When convinced that money

may be earned without disgrace, we ought to allow money to carry the day. When we talk of sordid gain and filthy lucre, we are generally hypocrites. If gains be sordid and lucre filthy, where is the priest, the lawyer, the doctor, or the man of literature, who does not wish for dirty hands? An income, and the power of putting by something for old age, something for those who are to come after, is the wholesome and acknowledged desire of all professional men. Thackeray having children, and being gifted with no power of making his money go very far, was anxious enough on the subject. We may say now, that had he confined himself to his pen, he would not have wanted while he lived, but would have left but little behind him. That he was anxious we have seen, by his attempts to subsidise his literary gains by a Government office. I cannot but think that had he undertaken public duties for which he was ill qualified, and received a salary which he could hardly have earned, he would have done less for his fame than by reading to the public. Whether he did that well or ill, he did it well enough for the money. The people who heard him, and who paid for their seats, were satisfied with their bargain—as they were also in the case of Dickens; and I venture to say that in becoming publicly a reader, neither did Dickens or Thackeray “alter his position as a writer,” and “that it was a change to be justified,” though the success of the old calling had in no degree waned. What Thackeray did enabled him to leave a comfortable income for his children, and one earned honestly, with the full approval of the world around him.

Having saturated his mind with the literature of Queen Anne’s time—not probably, in the first instance, as a preparation for *Esmond*, but in such a way as to induce him



to create an *Esmond*—he took the authors whom he knew so well as the subject for his first series of lectures. He wrote *The English Humourists of the Eighteenth Century* in 1851, while he must have been at work on *Esmond*, and first delivered the course at Willis's Rooms in that year. He afterwards went with these through many of our provincial towns, and then carried them to the United States, where he delivered them to large audiences in the winter of 1852 and 1853. Some few words as to the merits of the composition I will endeavour to say in another place. I myself never heard him lecture, and can therefore give no opinion of the performance. That which I have heard from others has been very various. It is, I think, certain that he had none of those wonderful gifts of elocution which made it a pleasure to listen to Dickens, whatever he read or whatever he said; nor had he that power of application by using which his rival taught himself with accuracy the exact effect to be given to every word. The rendering of a piece by Dickens was composed as an oratorio is composed, and was then studied by heart as music is studied. And the piece was all given by memory, without any looking at the notes or words. There was nothing of this with Thackeray. But the thing read was in itself of great interest to educated people. The words were given clearly, with sufficient intonation for easy understanding, so that they who were willing to hear something from him felt on hearing that they had received full value for their money. At any rate, the lectures were successful. The money was made—and was kept.

He came from his first trip to America to his new house in Onslow Square, and then published *The Newcomes*. This, too, was one of his great works, as to which I shall

have to speak hereafter. Then, having enjoyed his success in the first attempt to lecture, he prepared a second series. He never essayed the kind of reading which with Dickens became so wonderfully popular. Dickens recited portions from his well-known works. Thackeray wrote his lectures expressly for the purpose. They have since been added to his other literature, but they were prepared as lectures. The second series were *The Four Georges*. In a lucrative point of view they were even more successful than the first, the sum of money realised in the United States having been considerable. In England they were less popular, even if better attended, the subject chosen having been distasteful to many. There arose the question whether too much freedom had not been taken with an office which, though it be no longer considered to be founded on divine right, is still as sacred as can be anything that is human. If there is to remain among us a sovereign, that sovereign, even though divested of political power, should be endowed with all that personal respect can give. If we wish ourselves to be high, we should treat that which is over us as high. And this should not depend altogether on personal character, though we know—as we have reason to know—how much may be added to the firmness of the feeling by personal merit. The respect of which we speak should, in the strongest degree, be a possession of the immediate occupant, and will naturally become dim—or perhaps be exaggerated—in regard to the past, as history or fable may tell of them. No one need hesitate to speak his mind of King John, let him be ever so strong a stickler for the privileges of majesty. But there are degrees of distance, and the throne of which we wish to preserve the dignity seems to be assailed when unmeasured evil is said of one who has sat there within

our own memory. There would seem to each of us to be a personal affront were a departed relative delineated with all those faults by which we must own that even our near relatives have been made imperfect. It is a general conviction as to this which so frequently turns the biography of those recently dead into mere eulogy. The fictitious charity which is enjoined by the *de mortuis nil nisi bonum* banishes truth. The feeling of which I speak almost leads me at this moment to put down my pen. And, if so much be due to all subjects, is less due to a sovereign?

Considerations such as these diminished, I think, the popularity of Thackeray's second series of lectures; or, rather, not their popularity, but the estimation in which they were held. On this head he defended himself more than once very gallantly, and had a great deal to say on his side of the question. "Suppose, for example, in America—in Philadelphia or in New York—that I had spoken about George IV. in terms of praise and affected reverence, do you believe they would have hailed his name with cheers, or have heard it with anything of respect?" And again: "We degrade our own honour and the sovereign's by unduly and unjustly praising him; and the mere slaver and flatterer is one who comes forward, as it were, with flash notes, and pays with false coin his tribute to Cæsar. I don't disguise that I feel somehow on my trial here for loyalty—for honest English feeling." This was said by Thackeray at a dinner at Edinburgh, in 1857, and shows how the matter rested on his mind. Thackeray's loyalty was no doubt true enough, but was mixed with but little of reverence. He was one who revered modesty and innocence rather than power, against which he had in the bottom of his heart something of republican tendency. His leaning was no doubt of the more manly kind. But

in what he said at Edinburgh he hardly hit the nail on the head. No one had suggested that he should have said good things of a king which he did not believe to be true. The question was whether it may not be well sometimes for us to hold our tongues. An American literary man, here in England, would not lecture on the morals of Hamilton, on the manners of General Jackson, on the general amenities of President Johnson.

In 1857 Thackeray stood for Oxford, in the Liberal interest, in opposition to Mr. Cardwell. He had been induced to do this by his old friend Charles Neate, who himself twice sat for Oxford, and died now not many months since. He polled 1,017 votes, against 1,070 by Mr. Cardwell; and was thus again saved by his good fortune from attempting to fill a situation in which he would not have shone. There are, no doubt, many to whom a seat in Parliament comes almost as the birthright of a well-born and well-to-do English gentleman. They go there with no more idea of shining than they do when they are elected to a first-class club—hardly with more idea of being useful. It is the thing to do, and the House of Commons is the place where a man ought to be—for a certain number of hours. Such men neither succeed nor fail, for nothing is expected of them. From such a one as Thackeray something would have been expected, which would not have been forthcoming. He was too desultory for regular work—full of thought, but too vague for practical questions. He could not have endured to sit for two or three hours at a time with his hat over his eyes, pretending to listen, as is the duty of a good legislator. He was a man intolerant of tedium, and in the best of his time impatient of slow work. Nor, though his liberal feelings were very strong, were his political convictions definite or accurate. He was

a man who mentally drank in much, feeding his fancy hourly with what he saw, what he heard, what he read, and then pouring it all out with an immense power of amplification. But it would have been impossible for him to study and bring home to himself the various points of a complicated bill with a hundred and fifty clauses. In becoming a man of letters, and taking that branch of letters which fell to him, he obtained the special place that was fitted for him. He was a round peg in a round hole. There was no other hole which he would have fitted nearly so well. But he had his moment of political ambition, like others—and paid a thousand pounds for his attempt.

In 1857 the first number of *The Virginians* appeared; and the last—the twenty-fourth—in October, 1859. This novel, as all my readers are aware, is a continuance of *Esmond*, and will be spoken of in its proper place. He was then forty-eight years old, very gray, with much of age upon him, which had come from suffering—age shown by dislike of activity and by an old man's way of thinking about many things—speaking as though the world were all behind him instead of before; but still with a stalwart outward bearing, very erect in his gait, and a countenance peculiarly expressive and capable of much dignity. I speak of his personal appearance at this time, because it was then only that I became acquainted with him. In 1859 he undertook the last great work of his life, the editorship of *The Cornhill Magazine*, a periodical set on foot by Mr. George Smith, of the house of Smith and Elder, with an amount of energy greater than has generally been bestowed upon such enterprises. It will be well remembered still how much *The Cornhill* was talked about and thought of before it first appeared, and how much of that thinking and talking was due to the fact that Mr. Thackeray was to

edit it. *Macmillan's*, I think, was the first of the shilling magazines, having preceded *The Cornhill* by a month, and it would ill become me, who have been a humble servant to each of them, to give to either any preference. But it must be acknowledged that a great deal was expected from *The Cornhill*, and I think it will be confessed that it was the general opinion that a great deal was given by it. Thackeray had become big enough to give a special *éclat* to any literary exploit to which he attached himself. Since the days of *The Constitutional* he had fought his way up the ladder, and knew how to take his stand there with an assurance of success. When it became known to the world of readers that a new magazine was to appear under Thackeray's editorship, the world of readers was quite sure that there would be a large sale. Of the first number over one hundred and ten thousand were sold, and of the second and third over one hundred thousand. It is in the nature of such things that the sale should fall off when the novelty is over. People believe that a new delight has come, a new joy for ever, and then find that the joy is not quite so perfect or enduring as they had expected. But the commencement of such enterprises may be taken as a measure of what will follow. The magazine, either by Thackeray's name or by its intrinsic merits—probably by both—achieved a great success. My acquaintance with him grew from my having been one of his staff from the first.

About two months before the opening day I wrote to him suggesting that he should accept from me a series of four short stories on which I was engaged. I got back a long letter in which he said nothing about my short stories, but asking whether I could go to work at once and let him have a long novel, so that it might begin with the

first number. At the same time I heard from the publisher, who suggested some interesting little details as to honorarium. The little details were very interesting, but absolutely no time was allowed to me. It was required that the first portion of my book should be in the printer's hands within a month. Now it was my theory—and ever since this occurrence has been my practice—to see the end of my own work before the public should see the commencement.<sup>1</sup> If I did this thing I must not only abandon my theory, but instantly contrive a story, or begin to write it before it was contrived. That was what I did, urged by the interesting nature of the details. A novelist cannot always at the spur of the moment make his plot and create his characters who shall, with an arranged sequence of events, live with a certain degree of eventful decorum, through that portion of their lives which is to be portrayed. I hesitated, but allowed myself to be allured to what I felt to be wrong, much dreading the event. How seldom is it that theories stand the wear and tear of practice! I will not say that the story which came was good, but it was received with greater favour than any I had written before or have written since. I think that almost anything would have been then accepted coming under Thackeray's editorship.

I was astonished that work should be required in such haste, knowing that much preparation had been made, and

<sup>1</sup> I had begun an Irish story and half finished it, which would reach just the required length. Would that do? I asked. I was civilly told that my Irish story would no doubt be charming, but was not quite the thing that was wanted. Could I not begin a new one—English—and if possible about clergymen? The details were so interesting that had a couple of archbishops been demanded, I should have produced them.

that the service of almost any English novelist might have been obtained if asked for in due time. It was my readiness that was needed, rather than any other gift! The riddle was read to me after a time. Thackeray had himself intended to begin with one of his own great novels, but had put it off till it was too late. *Lovel the Widower* was commenced at the same time with my own story, but *Lovel the Widower* was not substantial enough to appear as the principal joint at the banquet. Though your guests will undoubtedly dine off the little delicacies you provide for them, there must be a heavy saddle of mutton among the viands prepared. I was the saddle of mutton, Thackeray having omitted to get his joint down to the fire in time enough. My fitness lay in my capacity for quick roasting.

It may be interesting to give a list of the contributors to the first number. My novel called *Framley Parsonage* came first. At this banquet the saddle of mutton was served before the delicacies. Then there was a paper by Sir John Bowring on *The Chinese and Outer Barbarians*. The commencing number of *Lovel the Widower* followed. George Lewes came next with his first chapters of *Studies in Animal Life*. Then there was Father Prout's *Inauguration Ode*, dedicated to the author of *Vanity Fair*—which should have led the way. I need hardly say that Father Prout was the Rev. F. Mahony. Then followed *Our Volunteers*, by Sir John Burgoyne; *A Man of Letters of the Last Generation*, by Thornton Hunt; *The Search for Sir John Franklin*, from a private journal of an officer of the Fox, now Sir Allen Young; and *The First Morning of 1860*, by Mrs. Archer Clive. The number was concluded by the first of those *Roundabout Papers* by Thackeray himself, which became so delightful a portion of the literature of *The Cornhill Magazine*.



It would be out of my power, and hardly interesting, to give an entire list of those who wrote for *The Cornhill* under Thackeray's editorial direction. But I may name a few, to show how strong was the support which he received. Those who contributed to the first number I have named. Among those who followed were Alfred Tennyson, Jacob Omnium, Lord Houghton, William Russell, Mrs. Beecher Stowe, Mrs. Browning, Robert Bell, George Augustus Sala, Mrs. Gaskell, James Hinton, Mary Howitt, John Kaye, Charles Lever, Frederick Locker, Laurence Oliphant, John Ruskin, Fitzjames Stephen, T. A. Trollope, Henry Thompson, Herman Merivale, Adelaide Proctor, Matthew Arnold, the present Lord Lytton, and Miss Thackeray, now Mrs. Ritchie. Thackeray continued the editorship for two years and four months, namely, up to April, 1862; but, as all readers will remember, he continued to write for it till he died, the day before Christmas Day, in 1863. His last contribution was, I think, a paper written for and published in the November number, called "*Strange to say on Club Paper,*" in which he vindicated Lord Clyde from the accusation of having taken the club stationery home with him. It was not a great subject, for no one could or did believe that the Field-Marshal had been guilty of any meanness; but the handling of it has made it interesting, and his indignation has made it beautiful.

The magazine was a great success, but justice compels me to say that Thackeray was not a good editor. As he would have been an indifferent civil servant, an indifferent member of Parliament, so was he perfunctory as an editor. It has sometimes been thought well to select a popular literary man as an editor; first, because his name will attract, and then with an idea that he who can write well himself will be a competent judge of the writings of oth-

ers. The first may sell a magazine, but will hardly make it good; and the second will not avail much, unless the editor so situated be patient enough to read what is sent to him. Of a magazine editor it is required that he should be patient, scrupulous, judicious, but above all things hard-hearted. I think it may be doubted whether Thackeray did bring himself to read the basketfuls of manuscripts with which he was deluged, but he probably did, sooner or later, read the touching little private notes by which they were accompanied—the heartrending appeals, in which he was told that if this or the other little article could be accepted and paid for, a starving family might be saved from starvation for a month. He tells us how he felt on receiving such letters in one of his *Roundabout Papers*, which he calls “*Thorns in the cushion.*” “How am I to know,” he says—“though to be sure I begin to know now—as I take the letters off the tray, which of those envelopes contains a real *bona fide* letter, and which a thorn? One of the best invitations this year I mistook for a thorn letter, and kept it without opening.” Then he gives the sample of a thorn letter. It is from a governess with a poem, and with a prayer for insertion and payment. “We have known better days, sir. I have a sick and widowed mother to maintain, and little brothers and sisters who look to me.” He could not stand this, and the money would be sent, out of his own pocket, though the poem might be—postponed, till happily it should be lost.

From such material a good editor could not be made. Nor, in truth, do I think that he did much of the editorial work. I had once made an arrangement, not with Thackeray, but with the proprietors, as to some little story. The story was sent back to me by Thackeray—rejected. *Virginibus puerisque!* That was the gist of his objection.

There was a project in a gentleman's mind—as told in my story—to run away with a married woman! Thackeray's letter was very kind, very regretful—full of apology for such treatment to such a contributor. But—*Virginibus puerisque!* I was quite sure that Thackeray had not taken the trouble to read the story himself. Some moral deputy had read it, and disapproving, no doubt properly, of the little project to which I have alluded, had incited the editor to use his authority. That Thackeray had suffered when he wrote it was easy to see, fearing that he was giving pain to one he would fain have pleased. I wrote him a long letter in return, as full of drollery as I knew how to make it. In four or five days there came a reply in the same spirit—boiling over with fun. He had kept my letter by him, not daring to open it—as he says that he did with that eligible invitation. At last he had given it to one of his girls to examine—to see whether the thorn would be too sharp, whether I had turned upon him with reproaches. A man so susceptible, so prone to work by fits and starts, so unmethodical, could not have been a good editor.

In 1862 he went into the new house which he had built for himself at Palace Green. I remember well, while this was still being built, how his friends used to discuss his imprudence in building it. Though he had done well with himself, and had made and was making a large income, was he entitled to live in a house the rent of which could not be counted at less than from five hundred to six hundred pounds a year? Before he had been there two years, he solved the question by dying—when the house was sold for two thousand pounds more than it had cost. He himself, in speaking of his project, was wont to declare that he was laying out his money in the best way he could

for the interest of his children; and it turned out that he was right. .

In 1863 he died in the house which he had built, and at the period of his death was writing a new novel in numbers, called *Denis Duval*. In *The Cornhill*, *The Adventures of Philip* had appeared. This new enterprise was destined for commencement on 1st January, 1864, and, though the writer was gone, it kept its promise, as far as it went. Three numbers, and what might probably have been intended for half of a fourth, appeared. It may be seen, therefore, that he by no means held to my theory, that the author should see the end of his work before the public sees the commencement. But neither did Dickens or Mrs. Gaskell, both of whom died with stories not completed, which, when they died, were in the course of publication. All the evidence goes against the necessity of such precaution. Nevertheless, were I giving advice to a tiro in novel writing, I should recommend it.

With the last chapter of *Denis Duval* was published in the magazine a set of notes on the book, taken for the most part from Thackeray's own papers, and showing how much collateral work he had given to the fabrication of his novel. No doubt in preparing other tales, especially *Esmond*, a very large amount of such collateral labour was found necessary. He was a man who did very much of such work, delighting to deal in little historical incidents. They will be found in almost everything that he did, and I do not know that he was ever accused of gross mistakes. But I doubt whether on that account he should be called a laborious man. He could go down to Winchelsea, when writing about the little town, to see in which way the streets lay, and to provide himself with what we call local colouring. He could jot down the suggestions, as they

came to his mind, of his future story. There was an irregularity in such work which was to his taste. His very notes would be delightful to read, partaking of the nature of pearls when prepared only for his own use. But he could not bring himself to sit at his desk and do an allotted task day after day. He accomplished what must be considered as quite a sufficient life's work. He had about twenty-five years for the purpose, and that which he has left is an ample produce for the time. Nevertheless he was a man of fits and starts, who, not having been in his early years drilled to method, never achieved it in his career.

He died on the day before Christmas Day, as has been said above, very suddenly, in his bed, early in the morning, in the fifty-third year of his life. To those who saw him about in the world there seemed to be no reason why he should not continue his career for the next twenty years. But those who knew him were so well aware of his constant sufferings, that, though they expected no sudden catastrophe, they were hardly surprised when it came. His death was probably caused by those spasms of which he had complained ten years before, in his letter to Mr. Reed. On the last day but one of the year, a crowd of sorrowing friends stood over his grave as he was laid to rest in Kensal Green; and, as quickly afterwards as it could be executed, a bust to his memory was put up in Westminster Abbey. It is a fine work of art, by Marochetti; but, as a likeness, is, I think, less effective than that which was modelled, and then given to the Garrick Club, by Durham, and has lately been put into marble, and now stands in the upper vestibule of the club. Neither of them, in my opinion, give so accurate an idea of the man as a statuette in bronze, by Boehm, of which two or three copies were made. One of them is in my possession. It has been alleged, in refer

ence to this, that there is something of a caricature in the lengthiness of the figure, in the two hands thrust into the trousers pockets, and in the protrusion of the chin. But this feeling has originated in the general idea that any face, or any figure, not made by the artist more beautiful or more graceful than the original is an injustice. The face must be smoother, the pose of the body must be more dignified, the proportions more perfect, than in the person represented, or satisfaction is not felt. Mr. Boehm has certainly not flattered, but, as far as my eye can judge, he has given the figure of the man exactly as he used to stand before us. I have a portrait of him in crayon, by Samuel Lawrence, as like, but hardly as natural.

A little before his death Thackeray told me that he had then succeeded in replacing the fortune which he had lost as a young man. He had, in fact, done better, for he left an income of seven hundred and fifty pounds behind him.

It has been said of Thackeray that he was a cynic. This has been said so generally, that the charge against him has become proverbial. This, stated barely, leaves one of two impressions on the mind, or perhaps the two together—that this cynicism was natural to his character and came out in his life, or that it is the characteristic of his writings. Of the nature of his writings generally, I will speak in the last chapter of this little book. As to his personal character as a cynic, I must find room to quote the following first stanzas of the little poem which appeared to his memory in *Punch*, from the pen of Shirley Brooks :

He was a cynic! By his life all wrought  
Of generous acts, mild words, and gentle ways;  
His heart wide open to all kindly thought,  
His hand so quick to give, his tongue to praise!

He was a cynic! You might read it writ  
In that broad brow, crowned with its silver hair;  
In those blue eyes, with childlike candour lit,  
In that sweet smile his lips were wont to wear!

He was a cynic! By the love that clung  
About him from his children, friends, and kin;  
By the sharp pain light pen and gossip tongue  
Wrought in him, chafing the soft heart within!

The spirit and nature of the man have been caught here with absolute truth. A public man should of course be judged from his public work. If he wrote as a cynic—a point which I will not discuss here—it may be fair that he who is to be known as a writer should be so called. But, as a man, I protest that it would be hard to find an individual farther removed from the character. Over and outside his fancy, which was the gift which made him so remarkable—a certain feminine softness was the most remarkable trait about him. To give some immediate pleasure was the great delight of his life—a sovereign to a schoolboy, gloves to a girl, a dinner to a man, a compliment to a woman. His charity was overflowing. His generosity excessive. I heard once a story of woe from a man who was the dear friend of both of us. The gentleman wanted a large sum of money instantly—something under two thousand pounds—had no natural friends who could provide it, but must go utterly to the wall without it. Pondering over this sad condition of things just revealed to me, I met Thackeray between the two mounted heroes at the Horse Guards, and told him the story. “Do you mean to say that I am to find two thousand pounds?” he said, angrily, with some expletives. I explained that I had not even suggested the doing of anything—only that we might discuss the matter. Then there came over

his face a peculiar smile, and a wink in his eye, and he whispered his suggestion, as though half ashamed of his meanness. "I'll go half," he said, "if anybody will do the rest." And he did go half, at a day or two's notice, though the gentleman was no more than simply a friend. I am glad to be able to add that the money was quickly repaid. I could tell various stories of the same kind, only that I lack space, and that they, if simply added one to the other, would lack interest.

He was no cynic, but he was a satirist, and could now and then be a satirist in conversation, hitting very hard when he did hit. When he was in America, he met at dinner a literary gentlemen of high character, middle-aged, and most dignified deportment. The gentleman was one whose character and acquirements stood very high—deservedly so—but who, in society, had that air of wrapping his toga around him, which adds, or is supposed to add, many cubits to a man's height. But he had a broken nose. At dinner he talked much of the tender passion, and did so in a manner which stirred up Thackeray's feeling of the ridiculous. "What has the world come to," said Thackeray, out loud to the table, "when two broken-nosed old fogies like you and me sit talking about love to each other!" The gentleman was astounded, and could only sit wrapping his toga in silent dismay for the rest of the evening. Thackeray then, as at other similar times, had no idea of giving pain, but when he saw a foible he put his foot upon it, and tried to stamp it out.

Such is my idea of the man whom many call a cynic, but whom I regard as one of the most soft-hearted of human beings, sweet as Charity itself, who went about the world dropping pearls, doing good, and never wilfully inflicting a wound.



## CHAPTER II.

### FRASER'S MAGAZINE AND PUNCH.

How Thackeray commenced his connection with *Fraser's Magazine* I am unable to say. We know how he had come to London with a view to a literary career, and that he had at one time made an attempt to earn his bread as a correspondent to a newspaper from Paris. It is probable that he became acquainted with the redoubtable Oliver Yorke, otherwise Dr. Maginn, or some of his staff, through the connection which he had thus opened with the press. He was not known, or at any rate he was unrecognized, by *Fraser* in January, 1835, in which month an amusing catalogue was given of the writers then employed, with portraits of them all seated at a symposium. I can trace no article to his pen before November, 1837, when the *Yellowplush Correspondence* was commenced, though it is hardly probable that he should have commenced with a work of so much pretension. There had been published a volume called *My Book, or the Anatomy of Conduct*, by John Skelton, and a very absurd book no doubt it was. We may presume that it contained maxims on etiquette, and that it was intended to convey in print those invaluable lessons on deportment which, as Dickens has told us, were subsequently given by Mr. Turveydrop, in the academy kept by him for that purpose. Thackeray took this

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as his foundation for the *Fashionable Fax and Polite Arnygoats*, by Jeames Yellowplush, with which he commenced those repeated attacks against snobbism which he delighted to make through a considerable portion of his literary life. Oliver Yorke has himself added four or five pages of his own to Thackeray's lucubrations; and with the second, and some future numbers, there appeared illustrations by Thackeray himself, illustrations at this time not having been common with the magazine. From all this I gather that the author was already held in estimation by *Fraser's* confraternity. I remember well my own delight with *Yellowplush* at the time, and how I inquired who was the author. It was then that I first heard Thackeray's name.

The *Yellowplush Papers* were continued through nine numbers. No further reference was made to Mr. Skelton and his book beyond that given at the beginning of the first number, and the satire is only shown by the attempt made by Yellowplush, the footman, to give his ideas generally on the manners of noble life. The idea seems to be that a gentleman may, in heart and in action, be as vulgar as a footman. No doubt he may, but the chances are very much that he won't. But the virtue of the memoir does not consist in the lessons, but in the general drollery of the letters. The "orthogwaphy is inaccuwate," as a certain person says in the memoirs—"so inaccuwate" as to take a positive study to "compwehend" it; but the joke, though old, is so handled as to be very amusing. Thackeray soon rushes away from his criticisms on snobbism to other matters. There are the details of a card-sharpping enterprise, in which we cannot but feel that we recognise something of the author's own experiences in the misfortunes of Mr. Dawkins; there is the Earl of Crab's, and then

the first of those attacks which he was tempted to make on the absurdities of his brethren of letters, and the only one which now has the appearance of having been ill-natured. His first victims were Dr. Dionysius Lardner and Mr. Edward Bulwer Lytton, as he was then. We can surrender the doctor to the whip of the satirist; and for "Sawedwadgeorgeearlittbulwig," as the novelist is made to call himself, we can well believe that he must himself have enjoyed the *Yellowplush Memoirs* if he ever re-read them in after-life. The speech in which he is made to dissuade the footman from joining the world of letters is so good that I will venture to insert it: "Bullwig was violently affected; a tear stood in his glistening i. 'Yellowplush,' says he, seizing my hand, 'you *are* right. Quit not your present occupation; black boots, clean knives, wear plush all your life, but don't turn literary man. Look at me. I am the first novelist in Europe. I have ranged with eagle wings over the wide regions of literature, and perched on every eminence in its turn. I have gazed with eagle eyes on the sun of philosophy, and fathomed the mysterious depths of the human mind. All languages are familiar to me, all thoughts are known to me, all men understood by me. I have gathered wisdom from the honed lips of Plato, as we wandered in the gardens of the Academies; wisdom, too, from the mouth of Job Johnson, as we smoked our backy in Seven Dials. Such must be the studies, and such is the mission, in this world of the Poet-Philosopher. But the knowledge is only emptiness; the initiation is but misery; the initiated a man shunned and banned by his fellows. Oh!' said Bullwig, clasping his hands, and throwing his fine i's up to the chandelier, 'the curse of Pwomethus descends upon his wace. Wath and punishment pursue them from genewation to genewa-

tion! Wo to genius, the heaven-scaler, the fire-stealer! Wo and thrice-bitter desolation! Earth is the wock on which Zeus, wemorseless, stwetches his withing wictim;—men, the vultures that feed and fatten on him. Ai, ai! it is agony eternal—gwoaning and solitawy despair! And you, Yellowplush, would penetwate these mystewies; you would waise the awful veil, and stand in the twemendous Pwesence. Beware, as you value your peace, beware! Withdwaw, wash Neophyte! For heaven's sake! O for heaven's sake!"—Here he looked round with agony;—"give me a glass of bwandy-and-water, for this clawet is beginnig to disagwee with me." It was thus that Thackeray began that vein of satire on his contemporaries of which it may be said that the older he grew the more amusing it was, and at the same time less likely to hurt the feelings of the author satirised.

The next tale of any length from Thackeray's pen, in the magazine, was that called *Catherine*, which is the story taken from the life of a wretched woman called Catherine Hayes. It is certainly not pleasant reading, and was not written with a pleasant purpose. It assumes to have come from the pen of Ikey Solomon, of Horse-monger Lane, and its object is to show how disgusting would be the records of thieves, cheats, and murderers 'if their doings and language were described according to their nature, instead of being handled in such a way as to create sympathy, and therefore imitation. Bulwer's *Eugene Aram*, Harrison Ainsworth's *Jack Sheppard*, and Dickens' Nancy were in his mind, and it was thus that he preached his sermon against the selection of such heroes and heroines by the novelists of the day. "Be it granted," he says, in his epilogue, "Solomon is dull; but don't attack his morality. He humbly submits that, in

his poem, no man shall mistake virtue for vice, no man shall allow a single sentiment of pity or admiration to enter his bosom for any character in the poem, it being from beginning to end a scene of unmixed rascality, performed by persons who never deviate into good feeling." The intention is intelligible enough, but such a story neither could have been written nor read—certainly not written by Thackeray, nor read by the ordinary reader of a first-class magazine—had he not been enabled to adorn it by infinite wit. Captain Brock, though a brave man, is certainly not described as an interesting or gallant soldier; but he is possessed of great resources. Captain Maeshane, too, is a thorough blackguard; but he is one with a dash of loyalty about him, so that the reader can almost sympathise with him, and is tempted to say that Ikey Solomon has not quite kept his promise.

*Catherine* appeared in 1839 and 1840. In the latter of those years *The Shabby Genteel* story also came out. Then, in 1841, there followed *The History of Samuel Titmarsh and the Great Hoggarty Diamond*, illustrated by Samuel's cousin, Michael Angelo. But though so announced in *Fraser*, there were no illustrations, and those attached to the story in later editions are not taken from sketches by Thackeray. This, as far as I know, was the first use of the name Titmarsh, and seems to indicate some intention on the part of the author of creating a hoax as to two personages—one the writer and the other the illustrator. If it were so, he must soon have dropped the idea. In the last paragraph he has shaken off his cousin Michael. The main object of the story is to expose the villany of bubble companies, and the danger they run who venture to have dealings with city matters which they do not understand. I cannot but think that he

altered his mind and changed his purpose while he was writing it, actuated probably by that editorial monition as to its length.

In 1842 were commenced *The Confessions of George Fitz-Boodle*, which were continued into 1843. I do not think that they attracted much attention, or that they have become peculiarly popular since. They are supposed to contain the reminiscences of a younger son, who moans over his poverty, complains of womankind generally, laughs at the world all round, and intersperses his pages with one or two excellent ballads. I quote one, written for the sake of affording a parody, with the parody along with it, because the two together give so strong an example of the condition of Thackeray's mind in regard to literary products. The "humbug" of everything, the pretence, the falseness of affected sentiment, the remoteness of poetical pathos from the true condition of the average minds of men and women, struck him so strongly, that he sometimes allowed himself almost to feel—or at any rate, to say—that poetical expression, as being above nature, must be unnatural. He had declared to himself that all humbug was odious, and should be by him laughed down to the extent of his capacity. His Yellowplush, his Catherine Hayes, his Fitz-Boodle, his Barry Lyndon, and Becky Sharp, with many others of this kind, were all invented and treated for this purpose and after this fashion. I shall have to say more on the same subject when I come to *The Snob Papers*. In this instance he wrote a very pretty ballad, *The Willow Tree*—so good that if left by itself it would create no idea of absurdity or extravagant pathos in the mind of the ordinary reader—simply that he might render his own work absurd by his own parody.

## THE WILLOW-TREE.

## No. I.

Know ye the willow-tree,  
 Whose gray leaves quiver,  
 Whispering gloomily  
 To yon pale river?  
 Lady, at eventide  
 Wander not near it!  
 They say its branches hide  
 A sad lost spirit!

Once to the willow-tree  
 A maid came fearful,  
 Pale seemed her cheek to be,  
 Her blue eye tearful.  
 Soon as she saw the tree,  
 Her steps moved fleeter.  
 No one was there—ah me!—  
 No one to meet her!

Quick beat her heart to hear  
 The far bells' chime  
 Toll from the chapel-tower  
 The trysting-time.  
 But the red sun went down  
 In golden flame,  
 And though she looked around,  
 Yet no one came!

Presently came the night,  
 Sadly to greet her—  
 Moon in her silver light,  
 Stars in their glitter.  
 Then sank the moon away  
 Under the billow.  
 Still wept the maid alone—  
 There by the willow!

## THE WILLOW-TREE.

## No. II.

Long by the willow-tree  
 Vainly they sought her,  
 Wild rang the mother's screams  
 O'er the gray water.  
 "Where is my lovely one?  
 Where is my daughter?"

Rouse thee, sir constable—  
 Rouse thee and look.  
 Fisherman, bring your net,  
 Boatman, your hook.  
 Beat in the lily-beds,  
 Dive in the brook."

Vainly the constable  
 Shouted and called her.  
 Vainly the fisherman  
 Beat the green alder.  
 Vainly he threw the net,  
 Never it hauled her!

Mother beside the fire  
 Sat, her night-cap in;  
 Father in easy-chair,  
 Gloomily napping;  
 When at the window-sill  
 Came a light tapping.

And a pale countenance  
 Looked through the casement.  
 Loud beat the mother's heart,  
 Sick with amazement,  
 And at the vision which  
 Came to surprise her!  
 Shrieking in an agony—  
 "Lor'! it's Elizar!"

Through the long darkness,  
 By the stream rolling,  
 Hour after hour went on  
 Tolling and tolling.  
 Long was the darkness,  
 Lonely and stilly.  
 Shrill came the night wind,  
 Piercing and chilly.

Shrill blew the morning breeze,  
 Biting and cold.  
 Bleak peers the gray dawn  
 Over the wold!  
 Bleak over moor and stream  
 Looks the gray dawn,  
 Gray with dishevelled hair.  
 Still stands the willow there—  
 The maid is gone!

Domine, Domine!  
 Sing we a litany—  
 Sing for poor maiden-hearts  
 broken and weary;  
 Sing we a litany,  
 Wail we and weep we a  
 wild miserere!

Yes, 'twas Elizabeth;—  
 Yes, 'twas their girl;  
 Pale was her cheek, and her  
 Hair out of curl.  
 "Mother!" the loved one,  
 Blushing exclaimed,  
 "Let not your innocent  
 Lizzy be blamed.

Yesterday, going to Aunt  
 Jones's to tea,  
 Mother, dear mother, I  
 Forgot the door-key!  
 And as the night was cold,  
 And the way steep,  
 Mrs. Jones kept me to  
 Breakfast and sleep."

Whether her pa and ma  
 Fully believed her,  
 That we shall never know.  
 Stern they received her;  
 And for the work of that  
 Cruel, though short, night—  
 Sent her to bed without  
 Tea for a fortnight.

#### MORAL.

Hey diddle diddlety,  
 Cat and the fiddlety,  
 Maidens of England take  
 caution by she!  
 Let love and suicide  
 Never tempt you aside,  
 And always remember to take  
 the door-key!

Mr. George Fitz-Boodle gave his name to other narra-  
 tives beyond his own *Confessions*. A series of stories was



carried on by him in *Fraser*, called *Men's Wives*, containing three: *Ravenwing, Mr. and Mrs. Frank Berry*, and *Dennis Hoggarty's Wife*. The first chapter in *Mr. and Mrs. Frank Berry* describes "The Fight at Slaughter House." Slaughter House, as Mr. Venables reminded us in the last chapter, was near Smithfield, in London—the school which afterwards became Grey Friars; and the fight between Biggs and Berry is the record of one which took place in the flesh when Thackeray was at the Charter House. But Mr. Fitz-Boodle's name was afterwards attached to a greater work than these, to a work so great that subsequent editors have thought him to be unworthy of the honour. In the January number, 1844, of *Fraser's Magazine*, are commenced the *Memoirs of Barry Lyndon*, and the authorship is attributed to Mr. Fitz-Boodle. The title given in the magazine was *The Luck of Barry Lyndon: a Romance of the last Century*. By Fitz-Boodle. In the collected edition of Thackeray's works the *Memoirs* are given as "Written by himself," and were, I presume, so brought out by Thackeray, after they had appeared in *Fraser*. Why Mr. George Fitz-Boodle should have been robbed of so great an honour I do not know.

In imagination, language, construction, and general literary capacity, Thackeray never did anything more remarkable than *Barry Lyndon*. I have quoted the words which he put into the mouth of Ikey Solomon, declaring that in the story which he has there told he has created nothing but disgust for the wicked characters he has produced, and that he has "used his humble endeavours to cause the public also to hate them." Here, in *Barry Lyndon*, he has, probably unconsciously, acted in direct opposition to his own principles. *Barry Lyndon* is as great a scoundrel as the mind of man ever conceived. He is one

who might have taken as his motto Satan's words: "Evil, be thou my good." And yet his story is so written that it is almost impossible not to entertain something of a friendly feeling for him. He tells his own adventures as a card-sharper, bully, and liar; as a heartless wretch, who had neither love nor gratitude in his composition; who had no sense even of loyalty; who regarded gambling as the highest occupation to which a man could devote himself, and fraud as always justified by success; a man possessed by all meannesses except cowardice. And the reader is so carried away by his frankness and energy as almost to rejoice when he succeeds, and to grieve with him when he is brought to the ground.

The man is perfectly satisfied as to the reasonableness—I might almost say, as to the rectitude—of his own conduct throughout. He is one of a decayed Irish family, that could boast of good blood. His father had obtained possession of the remnants of the property by turning Protestant, thus ousting the elder brother, who later on becomes his nephew's confederate in gambling. The elder brother is true to the old religion, and as the law stood in the last century, the younger brother, by changing his religion, was able to turn him out. Barry, when a boy, learns the slang and the gait of the debauched gentlemen of the day. He is specially proud of being a gentleman by birth and manners. He had been kidnapped, and made to serve as a common soldier, but boasts that he was at once fit for the occasion when enabled to show as a court gentleman. "I came to it at once," he says, "and as if I had never done anything else all my life. I had a gentleman to wait upon me, a French *friseur* to dress my hair of a morning. I knew the taste of chocolate as by intuition almost, and could distinguish between the right Spanish

and the French before I had been a week in my new position. I had rings on all my fingers and watches in both my fobs — canes, trinkets, and snuffboxes of all sorts. I had the finest natural taste for lace and china of any man I ever knew."

To dress well, to wear a sword with a grace, to carry away his plunder with affected indifference, and to appear to be equally easy when he loses his last ducat, to be agreeable to women, and to look like a gentleman—these are his accomplishments. In one place he rises to the height of a grand professor in the art of gambling, and gives his lessons with almost a noble air. "Play grandly, honourably. Be not, of course, cast down at losing; but above all, be not eager at winning, as mean souls are." And he boasts of his accomplishments with so much eloquence as to make the reader sure that he believes in them. He is quite pathetic over himself, and can describe with heartrending words the evils that befall him when others use against him successfully any of the arts which he practises himself.

The marvel of the book is not so much that the hero should evidently think well of himself, as that the author should so tell his story as to appear to be altogether on the hero's side. In *Catherine*, the horrors described are most truly disgusting — so much that the story, though very clever, is not pleasant reading. The *Memoirs of Barry Lyndon* are very pleasant to read. There is nothing to shock or disgust. The style of narrative is exactly that which might be used as to the exploits of a man whom the author intended to represent as deserving of sympathy and praise—so that the reader is almost brought to sympathise. But I should be doing an injustice to Thackeray if I were to leave an impression that he had

taught lessons tending to evil practice, such as he supposed to have been left by *Jack Sheppard* or *Eugene Aram*. No one will be tempted to undertake the life of a *chevalier d'industrie* by reading the book, or be made to think that cheating at cards is either an agreeable or a profitable profession. The following is excellent as a tirade in favour of gambling, coming from Redmond de Balibari, as he came to be called during his adventures abroad, but it will hardly persuade anyone to be a gambler :

“We always played on parole with anybody—any person, that is, of honour and noble lineage. We never pressed for our winnings, or declined to receive promissory notes in lieu of gold. But woe to the man who did not pay when the note became due! Redmond de Balibari was sure to wait upon him with his bill, and I promise you there were very few bad debts. On the contrary, gentlemen were grateful to us for our forbearance, and our character for honour stood unimpeached. In latter times, a vulgar national prejudice has chosen to cast a slur upon the character of men of honour engaged in the profession of play ; but I speak of the good old days of Europe, before the cowardice of the French aristocracy (in the shameful revolution, which served them right) brought discredit upon our order. They cry fie now upon men engaged in play ; but I should like to know how much more honourable *their* modes of livelihood are than ours. The broker of the Exchange, who bulls and bears, and buys and sells, and dabbles with lying loans, and trades upon state-secrets—what is he but a gamester? The merchant who deals in teas and tallow, is he any better? His bales of dirty indigo are his dice, his cards come up every year instead of every ten minutes, and the sea is his green-table. You call the profession of the law an honourable

one, where a man will lie for any bidder—lie down poverty for the sake of a fee from wealth; lie down right because wrong is in his brief. You call a doctor an honourable man—a swindling quack who does not believe in the nostrums which he prescribes, and takes your guinea for whispering in your ear that it is a fine morning. And yet, forsooth, a gallant man, who sits him down before the baize and challenges all comers, his money against theirs, his fortune against theirs, is proscribed by your modern moral world! It is a conspiracy of the middle-class against gentlemen. It is only the shopkeeper cant which is to go down nowadays. I say that play was an institution of chivalry. It has been wrecked along with other privileges of men of birth. When Seingalt engaged a man for six-and-thirty hours without leaving the table, do you think he showed no courage? How have we had the best blood, and the brightest eyes too, of Europe throbbing round the table, as I and my uncle have held the cards and the bank against some terrible player, who was matching some thousands out of his millions against our all, which was there on the baize! When we engaged that daring Alexis Kossloffsky, and won seven thousand louis on a single coup, had we lost we should have been beggars the next day; when *he* lost, he was only a village and a few hundred serfs in pawn the worse. When at Toeplitz the Duke of Courland brought fourteen laqueys, each with four bags of florins, and challenged our bank to play against the sealed bags, what did we ask? 'Sir,' said we, 'we have but eighty thousand florins in bank, or two hundred thousand at three months. If your highness's bags do not contain more than eighty thousand we will meet you.' And we did; and after eleven hours' play, in which our bank was at one time reduced to two hundred and

three ducats, we won seventeen thousand florins of him. Is *this* not something like boldness? Does this profession not require skill, and perseverance, and bravery? Four crowned heads looked on at the game, and an imperial princess, when I turned up the ace of hearts and made Paroli, burst into tears. No man on the European Continent held a higher position than Redmond Barry then; and when the Duke of Courland lost, he was pleased to say that we had won nobly. And so we had, and spent nobly what we won." This is very grand, and is put as an eloquent man would put it who really wished to defend gambling.

The rascal, of course, comes to a miserable end, but the tone of the narrative is continued throughout. He is brought to live at last with his old mother in the Fleet prison, on a wretched annuity of fifty pounds per annum, which she has saved out of the general wreck, and there he dies of delirium tremens. For an assumed tone of continued irony, maintained through the long memoir of a life, never becoming tedious, never unnatural, astounding us rather by its naturalness, I know nothing equal to *Barry Lyndon*.

As one reads, one sometimes is struck by a conviction that this or the other writer has thoroughly liked the work on which he is engaged. There is a gusto about his passages, a liveliness in the language, a spring in the motion of the words, an eagerness of description, a lilt, if I may so call it, in the progress of the narrative, which makes the reader feel that the author has himself greatly enjoyed what he has written. He has evidently gone on with his work without any sense of weariness or doubt; and the words have come readily to him. So it has been with *Barry Lyndon*. "My mind was filled full with those

blackguards," Thackeray once said to a friend. It is easy enough to see that it was so. In the passage which I have above quoted, his mind was running over with the idea that a rascal might be so far gone in rascality as to be in love with his own trade.

This was the last of Thackeray's long stories in *Fraser*. I have given by no means a complete catalogue of his contributions to the magazine, but I have perhaps mentioned those which are best known. There were many short pieces which have now been collected in his works, such as *Little Travels and Roadside Sketches*, and the *Carmen Lillense*, in which the poet is supposed to be detained at Lille by want of money. There are others which I think are not to be found in the collected works, such as a *Box of Novels by Titmarsh*, and *Titmarsh in the Picture Galleries*. After the name of Titmarsh had been once assumed it was generally used in the papers which he sent to *Fraser*.

Thackeray's connection with *Punch* began in 1843, and, as far as I can learn, *Miss Tickletoby's Lectures on English History* was his first contribution. They, however, have not been found worthy of a place in the collected edition. His short pieces during a long period of his life were so numerous that to have brought them all together would have weighted his more important works with too great an amount of extraneous matter. The same lady, Miss Tickletoby, gave a series of lectures. There was *The History of the next French Revolution*, and *The Wanderings of our Fat Contributor*—the first of which is, and the latter is not, perpetuated in his works. Our old friend Jeames Yellowplush, or De la Pluche—for we cannot for a moment doubt that he is the same Jeames—is very prolific, and as excellent in his orthography, his sense, and

satire, as ever. These papers began with *The Lucky Speculator*. He lives in The Albany; he hires a brougham; and is devoted to Miss Emily Flimsey, the daughter of Sir George, who had been his master—to the great injury of poor Maryanne, the fellow-servant who had loved him in his kitchen days. Then there follows that wonderful ballad, *Jeames of Backley Square*. Upon this he writes an angry letter to *Punch*, dated from his chambers in The Albany: “Has a reglar suscriber to your amusing paper, I beg leaf to state that I should never have done so had I supposed that it was your ’abbit to igspose the mistaries of privit life, and to hinger the delligit feelings of umble individyous like myself.” He writes in his own defence, both as to Maryanne and to the share-dealing by which he had made his fortune; and he ends with declaring his right to the position which he holds. “You are corriet in stating that I am of hancient Normin fam’ly. This is more than Peal can say, to whomb I applied for a barnetcy; but the primmier being of low igstraction, natrally stikles for his horder.” And the letter is signed “Fitz-james De la Pluche.” Then follows his diary, beginning with a description of the way in which he rushed into *Punch’s* office, declaring his misfortunes, when losses had come upon him. “I wish to be paid for my contribewtions to your paper. Suckmstances is altered with me.” Whereupon he gets a cheque upon Messrs. Pump and Aldgate, and has himself carried away to new speculations. He leaves his diary behind him, and *Punch* surreptitiously publishes it. There is much in the diary which comes from Thackeray’s very heart. Who does not remember his indignation against Lord Bareacres? “I gave the old humbug a few shares out of my own pocket. ‘There, old Pride,’ says I, ‘I like to see you down on your knees to a



footman. There, old Pomposity! Take fifty pounds. I like to see you come cringing and begging for it! Whenever I see him in a very public place, I take my change for my money. I digg him in the ribbs, or clap his padded old shoulders. I call him 'Bareacres, my old brick,' and I see him wince. It does my 'art good." It does Thackeray's heart good to pour himself out in indignation against some imaginary Bareacres. He blows off his steam with such an eagerness that he forgets for a time, or nearly forgets, his cacography. Then there are "Jeames on Time Bargings," "Jeames on the Guage Question," "Mr. Jeames again." Of all our author's heroes Jeames is perhaps the most amusing. There is not much in that joke of bad spelling, and we should have been inclined to say beforehand, that Mrs. Malaprop had done it so well and so sufficiently, that no repetition of it would be received with great favour. Like other dishes, it depends upon the cooking. Jeames, with his "suckmstances," high or low, will be immortal.

There were *The Travels in London*, a long series of them; and then *Punch's Prize Novelists*, in which Thackeray imitates the language and plots of Bulwer, Disraeli, Charles Lever, G. P. R. James, Mrs. Gore, and Cooper, the American. They are all excellent; perhaps *Codlingsby* is the best. Mendoza, when he is fighting with the barge-man, or drinking with *Codlingsby*, or receiving Louis Philippe in his rooms, seems to have come direct from the pen of our Premier. Phil Fogerty's jump, and the younger and the elder horsemen, as they come riding into the story, one in his armour and the other with his feathers, have the very savour and tone of Lever and James; but then the savour and the tone are not so piquant. I know nothing in the way of imitation to equal *Codlingsby*, if it

be not *The Tale of Drury Lane*, by W. S. in the *Rejected Addresses*, of which it is said that Walter Scott declared that he must have written it himself. The scene between Dr. Franklin, Louis XVI., Marie Antoinette, and Tatum, the chief of the Nose-rings, as told in *The Stars and Stripes*, is perfect in its way, but it fails as being a caricature of Cooper. The caricaturist has been carried away beyond and above his model, by his own sense of fun.

Of the ballads which appeared in *Punch* I will speak elsewhere; as I must give a separate short chapter to our author's power of versification; but I must say a word of *The Snob Papers*, which were at the time the most popular and the best known of all Thackeray's contributions to *Punch*. I think that perhaps they were more charming, more piquant, more apparently true, when they came out one after another in the periodical, than they are now as collected together. I think that one at a time would be better than many. And I think that the first half in the long list of snobs would have been more manifestly snobs to us than they are now with the second half of the list appended. In fact, there are too many of them, till the reader is driven to tell himself that the meaning of it all is that Adam's family is from first to last a family of snobs. "First," says Thackeray, in preface, "the world was made; then, as a matter of course, snobs; they existed for years and years, and were no more known than America. But presently—*ingens patebat tellus*—the people became darkly aware that there was such a race. Not above five-and-twenty years since, a name, an expressive monosyllable, arose to designate that case. That name has spread over England like railroads subsequently; snobs are known and recognised throughout an empire on which I am given to understand the sun never sets. *Punch* ap-

pears at the right season to chronicle their history; and the individual comes forth to write that history in *Punch*.

“I have—and for this gift I congratulate myself with a deep and abiding thankfulness—an eye for a snob. If the truthful is the beautiful, it is beautiful to study even the snobbish—to track snobs through history as certain little dogs in Hampshire hunt out truffles; to sink shafts in society, and come upon rich veins of snob-ore. Snob-bishness is like Death, in a quotation from Horace, which I hope you never heard, ‘beating with equal foot at poor men’s doors, and kicking at the gates of emperors.’ It is a great mistake to judge of snobs lightly, and think they exist among the lower classes merely. An immense percentage of snobs, I believe, is to be found in every rank of this mortal life. You must not judge hastily or vulgarly of snobs; to do so shows that you are yourself a snob. I myself have been taken for one.”

The state of Thackeray’s mind when he commenced his delineations of snobbery is here accurately depicted. Written, as these papers were, for *Punch*, and written, as they were, by Thackeray, it was a necessity that every idea put forth should be given as a joke, and that the satire on society in general should be wrapped up in burlesque absurdity. But not the less eager and serious was his intention. When he tells us, at the end of the first chapter, of a certain Colonel Snobley, whom he met at “Bagnigge Wells,” as he says, and with whom he was so disgusted that he determined to drive the man out of the house, we are well aware that he had met an offensive military gentleman—probably at Tunbridge. Gentlemen thus offensive, even though tamely offensive, were peculiarly offensive to him. We presume, by what follows, that this gentleman, ignorantly—for himself most unfortunate-

ly—spoke of Publicōla. Thackeray was disgusted—disgusted that such a name should be lugged into ordinary conversation at all, and then that a man should talk about a name with which he was so little acquainted as not to know how to pronounce it. The man was therefore a snob, and ought to be put down; in all which I think that Thackeray was unnecessarily hard on the man, and gave him too much importance.

So it was with him in his whole intercourse with snobs—as he calls them. He saw something that was distasteful, and a man instantly became a snob in his estimation. “But you *can* draw,” a man once said to him, there having been some discussion on the subject of Thackeray’s art powers. The man meant no doubt to be civil, but meant also to imply that for the purpose needed the drawing was good enough—a matter on which he was competent to form an opinion. Thackeray instantly put the man down as a snob for flattering him. The little courtesies of the world and the little discourtesies became snobbish to him. A man could not wear his hat, or carry his umbrella, or mount his horse, without falling into some error of snobbism before his hypercritical eyes. St. Michael would have carried his armour amiss, and St. Cecilia have been snobbish as she twanged her harp.

I fancy that a policeman considers that every man in the street would be properly “run in,” if only all the truth about the man had been known. The tinker thinks that every pot is unsound. The cobbler doubts the stability of every shoe. So at last it grew to be the case with Thackeray. There was more hope that the city should be saved because of its ten just men, than for society, if society were to depend on ten who were not snobs. All this arose from the keenness of his vision into that which

was really mean. But that keenness became so aggravated by the intenseness of his search that the slightest speck of dust became to his eyes as a foul stain. Publicōla, as we saw, damned one poor man to a wretched immortality, and another was called pitilessly over the coals because he had mixed a grain of flattery with a bushel of truth. Thackeray tells us that he was born to hunt out snobs, as certain dogs are trained to find truffles. But we can imagine that a dog, very energetic at producing truffles, and not finding them as plentiful as his heart desired, might occasionally produce roots which were not genuine—might be carried on in his energies till to his senses every fungus-root became a truffle. I think that there has been something of this with our author's snob-hunting, and that his zeal was at last greater than his discrimination.

The nature of the task which came upon him made this fault almost unavoidable. When a hit is made, say with a piece at a theatre, or with a set of illustrations, or with a series of papers on this or the other subject—when something of this kind has suited the taste of the moment, and gratified the public, there is a natural inclination on the part of those who are interested to continue that which has been found to be good. It pays and it pleases, and it seems to suit everybody. Then it is continued usque ad nauseam. We see it in everything. When the king said he liked partridges, partridges were served to him every day. The world was pleased with certain ridiculous portraits of its big men. The big men were soon used up, and the little men had to be added.

We can imagine that even *Punch* may occasionally be at a loss for subjects wherewith to delight its readers. In fact, *The Snob Papers* were too good to be brought to an end, and therefore there were forty-five of them. A dozen

would have been better. As he himself says in his last paper, "for a mortal year we have been together flattering and abusing the human race." It was exactly that. Of course we know—everybody always knows—that a bad specimen of his order may be found in every division of society. There may be a snob king, a snob parson, a snob member of parliament, a snob grocer, tailor, goldsmith, and the like. But that is not what has been meant. We did not want a special satirist to tell us what we all knew before. Had snobbishness been divided for us into its various attributes and characteristics, rather than attributed to various classes, the end sought—the exposure, namely, of the evil—would have been better attained. The snobbishness of flattery, of falsehood, of cowardice, lying, time-serving, money-worship, would have been perhaps attacked to a better purpose than that of kings, priests, soldiers, merchants, or men of letters. The assault as made by Thackeray seems to have been made on the profession generally.

The paper on clerical snobs is intended to be essentially generous, and is ended by an allusion to certain old clerical friends which has a sweet tone of tenderness in it. "How should he who knows you, not respect you or your calling? May this pen never write a pennyworth again if it ever casts ridicule upon either." But in the mean time he has thrown his stone at the covetousness of bishops, because of certain Irish prelates who died rich many years before he wrote. The insinuation is that bishops generally take more of the loaves and fishes than they ought, whereas the fact is that bishops' incomes are generally so insufficient for the requirements demanded of them, that a feeling prevails that a clergyman to be fit for a bishopric should have a private income. He attacks the snob-

bishness of the universities, showing us how one class of young men consists of fellow-commoners, who wear lace and drink wine with their meals, and another class consists of sizars, or servitors, who wear badges, as being poor, and are never allowed to take their food with their fellow-students. That arrangements fit for past times are not fit for these is true enough. Consequently, they should gradually be changed, and from day to day are changed. But there is no snobbishness in this. Was the fellow-commoner a snob when he acted in accordance with the custom of his rank and standing? or the sizar who accepted aid in achieving that education which he could not have got without it? or the tutor of the college, who carried out the rules entrusted to him? There are two military snobs, Rag and Famish. One is a swindler, and the other a debauched young idiot. No doubt they are both snobs, and one has been, while the other is, an officer. But there is, I think, not an unfairness so much as an absence of intuition, in attaching to soldiers especially two vices to which all classes are open. Rag was a gambling snob, and Famish a drunken snob; but they were not specially military snobs. There is a chapter devoted to dinner-giving snobs, in which I think the doctrine laid down will not hold water, and therefore that the snobbism imputed is not proved. "Your usual style of meal," says the satirist—"that is plenteous, comfortable, and in its perfection—should be that to which you welcome your friends." Then there is something said about the "Brummagem plate pomp," and we are told that it is right that dukes should give grand dinners, but that we—of the middle class—should entertain our friends with the simplicity which is customary with us. In all this there is, I think, a mistake. The duke gives a grand dinner because he

thinks his friends will like it; sitting down when alone with the duchess, we may suppose, with a retinue and grandeur less than that which is arrayed for gala occasions. So is it with Mr. Jones, who is no snob because he provides a costly dinner—if he can afford it. He does it because he thinks his friends will like it. It may be that the grand dinner is a bore—and that the leg of mutton, with plenty of gravy and potatoes all hot, would be nicer. I generally prefer the leg of mutton myself. But I do not think that snobbery is involved in the other. A man, no doubt, may be a snob in giving a dinner. I am not a snob because for the occasion I eke out my own dozen silver forks with plated ware; but if I make believe that my plated ware is true silver, then I am a snob.

In that matter of association with our betters—we will for the moment presume that gentlemen and ladies with titles or great wealth are our betters—great and delicate questions arise as to what is snobbery and what is not, in speaking of which Thackeray becomes very indignant, and explains the intensity of his feelings as thoroughly by a charming little picture as by his words. It is a picture of Queen Elizabeth as she is about to trample with disdain on the coat which that snob Raleigh is throwing for her use on the mud before her. This is intended to typify the low parasite nature of the Englishman which has been described in the previous page or two. “And of these calm moralists”—it matters not for our present purpose who were the moralists in question—“is there one, I wonder, whose heart would not throb with pleasure if he could be seen walking arm-in-arm with a couple of dukes down Pall Mall? No; it is impossible, in our condition of society, not to be sometimes a snob.” And again: “How should it be otherwise in a country where lord-



olatry is part of our creed, and where our children are brought up to respect the 'Peerage' as the Englishman's second Bible?" Then follows the wonderfully graphic picture of Queen Elizabeth and Raleigh.

In all this Thackeray has been carried away from the truth by his hatred for a certain meanness of which there are no doubt examples enough. As for Raleigh, I think we have always sympathised with the young man, instead of despising him, because he felt on the impulse of the moment that nothing was too good for the woman and the queen combined. The idea of getting something in return for his coat could hardly have come so quick to him as that impulse in favour of royalty and womanhood. If one of us to-day should see the queen passing, would he not raise his hat, and assume, unconsciously, something of an altered demeanour because of his reverence for majesty? In doing so he would have no mean desire of getting anything. The throne and its occupant are to him honourable, and he honours them. There is surely no greater mistake than to suppose that reverence is snobbishness. I meet a great man in the street, and some chance having brought me to his knowledge, he stops and says a word to me. Am I a snob because I feel myself to be graced by his notice? Surely not. And if his acquaintance goes further and he asks me to dinner, am I not entitled so far to think well of myself because I have been found worthy of his society?

They who have raised themselves in the world, and they, too, whose position has enabled them to receive all that estimation can give, all that society can furnish, all that intercourse with the great can give, are more likely to be pleasant companions than they who have been less fortunate. That picture of two companion dukes in Pall

Mall is too gorgeous for human eye to endure. A man would be scorched to cinders by so much light, as he would be crushed by a sack of sovereigns even though he might be allowed to have them if he could carry them away. But there can be no doubt that a peer taken at random as a companion would be preferable to a clerk from a counting-house—taken at random. The clerk might turn out a scholar on your hands, and the peer no better than a poor spendthrift; but the chances are the other way.

A tuft-hunter is a snob, a parasite is a snob, the man who allows the manhood within him to be awed by a coronet is a snob. The man who worships mere wealth is a snob. But so also is he who, in fear lest he should be called a snob, is afraid to seek the acquaintance—or if it come to speak of the acquaintance—of those whose acquaintance is manifestly desirable. In all this I feel that Thackeray was carried beyond the truth by his intense desire to put down what is mean.

It is in truth well for us all to know what constitutes snobbism, and I think that Thackeray, had he not been driven to dilution and dilatation, could have told us. If you will keep your hands from picking and stealing, and your tongue from evil speaking, lying, and slandering, you will not be a snob. The lesson seems to be simple, and perhaps a little trite, but if you look into it, it will be found to contain nearly all that is necessary.

But the excellence of each individual picture as it is drawn is not the less striking because there may be found some fault with the series as a whole. What can excel the telling of the story of Captain Shindy at his club—which is, I must own, as true as it is graphic? Captain Shindy is a real snob. “Look at it, sir; is it cooked?”

Smell it, sir. Is it meat fit for a gentleman?" he roars out to the steward, who stands trembling before him, and who in vain tells him that the Bishop of Bullocksmithy has just had three from the same loin." The telling as regards Captain Shindy is excellent, but the sidelong attack upon the episcopate is cruel. "All the waiters in the club are huddled round the captain's mutton-chop. He roars out the most horrible curses at John for not bringing the pickles. He utters the most dreadful oaths because Thomas has not arrived with the Harvey sauce. Peter comes tumbling with the water-jug over Jeames, who is bringing the 'glittering canisters with bread.'

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"Poor Mrs. Shindy and the children are, meanwhile, in dingy lodgings somewhere, waited upon by a charity girl in pattens."

The visit to Castle Carabas, and the housekeeper's description of the wonders of the family mansion, is as good. "The Side Entrance and 'All,' says the housekeeper. 'The halligator hover the mantelpiece was brought home by Hadmiral St. Michaels, when a capting with Lord Hanson. The harms on the cheers is the harms of the Carabas family. The great 'all is seventy feet in lenth, fifty-six in breath, and thirty-eight feet 'igh. The carvings of the chimlies, representing the buth of Venus and 'Ercules and 'Eyelash, is by Van Chislum, the most famous sculpture of his hage and country. The ceiling, by Calimanco, represents Painting, Harchitecture, and Music—the naked female figure with the barrel-organ—introducing George, first Lord Carabas, to the Temple of the Muses. The winder ornaments is by Vanderputty. The floor is Patagonian marble; and the chandelier in the centre was presented to Lionel, second marquis, by Lewy the Sixteenth,

whose 'ead was cut hoff in the French Revolution. We now henter the South Gallery," etc., etc. All of which is very good fun, with a dash of truth in it also as to the snobbery—only in this it will be necessary to be quite sure where the snobbery lies. If my Lord Carabas has a "buth of Venus," beautiful for all eyes to see, there is no snobbery, only good-nature, in the showing it; nor is there snobbery in going to see it, if a beautiful "buth of Venus" has charms for you. If you merely want to see the inside of a lord's house, and the lord is puffed up with the pride of showing his, then there will be two snobs.

Of all those papers it may be said that each has that quality of a pearl about it which in the previous chapter I endeavoured to explain. In each some little point is made in excellent language, so as to charm by its neatness, incision, and drollery. But *The Snob Papers* had better be read separately, and not taken in the lump.

Thackeray ceased to write for *Punch* in 1852, either entirely or almost so.

## CHAPTER III.

### VANITY FAIR.

SOMETHING has been said, in the biographical chapter, of the way in which *Vanity Fair* was produced, and of the period in the author's life in which it was written. He had become famous—to a limited extent—by the exquisite nature of his contributions to periodicals; but he desired to do something larger, something greater, something, perhaps, less ephemeral. For though *Barry Lyndon* and others have not proved to be ephemeral, it was thus that he regarded them. In this spirit he went to work and wrote *Vanity Fair*.

It may be as well to speak first of the faults which were attributed to it. It was said that the good people were all fools, and that the clever people were all knaves. When the critics—the talking critics as well as the writing critics—began to discuss *Vanity Fair*, there had already grown up a feeling as to Thackeray as an author—that he was one who had taken up the business of castigating the vices of the world. Scott had dealt with the heroes, whether displayed in his *Flora MacIvors* or *Meg Merrilieses*, in his *Ivanhoes* or *Ochiltrees*. *Miss Edgeworth* had been moral; *Miss Austen* conventional; *Bulwer* had been poetical and sentimental; *Marryatt* and *Lever* had been funny and pugnacious, always with a dash of

gallantry, displaying funny naval and funny military life; and Dickens had already become great in painting the virtues of the lower orders. But by all these some kind of virtue had been sung, though it might be only the virtue of riding a horse or fighting a duel. Even Eugene Aram and Jack Sheppard, with whom Thackeray found so much fault, were intended to be fine fellows, though they broke into houses and committed murders. The primary object of all those writers was to create an interest by exciting sympathy. To enhance our sympathy personages were introduced who were very vile indeed—as Bucklaw, in the guise of a lover, to heighten our feelings for Ravenswood and Lucy; as Wild, as a thief-taker, to make us more anxious for the saving of Jack; as Ralph Nickleby, to pile up the pity for his niece Kate. But each of these novelists might have appropriately begun with an *Arma virumque cano*. The song was to be of something god-like—even with a Peter Simple. With Thackeray it had been altogether different. Alas, alas! the meanness of human wishes; the poorness of human results! That had been his tone. There can be no doubt that the heroic had appeared contemptible to him, as being untrue. The girl who had deceived her papa and mamma seemed more probable to him than she who perished under the willow-tree from sheer love—as given in the last chapter. Why sing songs that are false? Why tell of Lucy Ashtons and Kate Nicklebys, when pretty girls, let them be ever so beautiful, can be silly and sly? Why pour philosophy out of the mouth of a fashionable young gentleman like Pelham, seeing that young gentlemen of that sort rarely, or we may say never, talk after that fashion? Why make a house-breaker a gallant charming young fellow, the truth being that house-breakers as a rule are as objectionable in

their manners as they are in their morals? Thackeray's mind had in truth worked in this way, and he had become a satirist. That had been all very well for *Fraser* and *Punch*; but when his satire was continued through a long novel, in twenty-four parts, readers—who do in truth like the heroic better than the wicked—began to declare that this writer was no novelist, but only a cynic.

Thence the question arises what a novel should be—which I will endeavour to discuss very shortly in a later chapter. But this special fault was certainly found with *Vanity Fair* at the time. Heroines should not only be beautiful, but should be endowed also with a quasi celestial grace—grace of dignity, propriety, and reticence. A heroine should hardly want to be married, the arrangement being almost too mundane—and, should she be brought to consent to undergo such bond, because of its acknowledged utility, it should be at some period so distant as hardly to present itself to the mind as a reality. Eating and drinking should be altogether indifferent to her, and her clothes should be picturesque rather than smart, and that from accident rather than design. Thackeray's Amelia does not at all come up to the description here given. She is proud of having a lover, constantly declaring to herself and to others that he is “the greatest and the best of men”—whereas the young gentleman is, in truth, a very little man. She is not at all indifferent as to her finery, nor, as we see incidentally, to enjoying her suppers at Vauxhall. She is anxious to be married—and as soon as possible. A hero, too, should be dignified and of a noble presence; a man who, though he may be as poor as Nicholas Nickleby, should nevertheless be beautiful on all occasions, and never deficient in readiness, address, or self-assertion. *Vanity Fair* is specially declared by the

author to be "a novel without a hero," and therefore we have hardly a right to complain of deficiency of heroic conduct in any of the male characters. But Captain Dobbin does become the hero, and is deficient. Why was he called Dobbin, except to make him ridiculous? Why is he so shamefully ugly, so shy, so awkward? Why was he the son of a grocer? Thackeray in so depicting him was determined to run counter to the recognised taste of novel readers. And then again there was the feeling of another great fault. Let there be the virtuous in a novel and let there be the vicious, the dignified and the undignified, the sublime and the ridiculous—only let the virtuous, the dignified, and the sublime be in the ascendant. Edith Bellenden, and Lord Evandale, and Morton himself would be too stilted, were they not enlivened by Mause, and Cuddie, and Poundtext. But here, in this novel, the vicious and the absurd have been made to be of more importance than the good and the noble. Becky Sharp and Rawdon Crawley are the real heroine and hero of the story. It is with them that the reader is called upon to interest himself. It is of them that he will think when he is reading the book. It is by them that he will judge the book when he has read it. There was no doubt a feeling with the public that though satire may be very well in its place, it should not be made the backbone of a work so long and so important as this. A short story such as *Catherine* or *Barry Lyndon* might be pronounced to have been called for by the iniquities of an outside world; but this seemed to the readers to have been addressed almost to themselves. Now men and women like to be painted as Titian would paint them, or Raffaele—not as Rembrandt, or even Rubens.

Whether the ideal or the real is the best form of a



novel may be questioned, but there can be no doubt that as there are novelists who cannot descend from the bright heaven of the imagination to walk with their feet upon the earth, so there are others to whom it is not given to soar among clouds. The reader must please himself, and make his selection if he cannot enjoy both. There are many who are carried into a heaven of pathos by the woes of a Master of Ravenswood, who fail altogether to be touched by the enduring constancy of a Dobbin. There are others—and I will not say but they may enjoy the keenest delight which literature can give—who cannot employ their minds on fiction unless it be conveyed in poetry. With Thackeray it was essential that the representations made by him should be, to his own thinking, life-like. A Dobbin seemed to him to be such a one as might probably be met with in the world, whereas to his thinking a Ravenswood was simply a creature of the imagination. He would have said of such, as we would say of female faces by Raffaele, that women would like to be like them, but are not like them. Men might like to be like Ravenswood, and women may dream of men so formed and constituted, but such men do not exist. Dobbins do, and therefore Thackeray chose to write of a Dobbin.

So also of the preference given to Becky Sharp and to Rawdon Crawley. Thackeray thought that more can be done by exposing the vices than extolling the virtues of mankind. No doubt he had a more thorough belief in the one than in the other. The Dobbins he did encounter—seldom; the Rawdon Crawleys very often. He saw around him so much that was mean! He was hurt so often by the little vanities of people! It was thus that he was driven to that overthoughtfulness about snobs of

which I have spoken in the last chapter. It thus became natural to him to insist on the thing which he hated with unceasing assiduity, and only to break out now and again into a rapture of love for the true nobility which was dear to him—as he did with the character of Captain Dobbin.

It must be added to all this, that, before he has done with his snob or his knave, he will generally weave in some little trait of humanity by which the sinner shall be relieved from the absolute darkness of utter iniquity. He deals with no Varneys or Deputy-Shepherds, all villany and all lies, because the snobs and knaves he had seen had never been all snob or all knave. Even Shindy probably had some feeling for the poor woman he left at home. Rawdon Crawley loved his wicked wife dearly, and there were moments even with her in which some redeeming trait half reconciles her to the reader.

Such were the faults which were found in *Vanity Fair*; but though the faults were found freely, the book was read by all. Those who are old enough can well remember the effect which it had, and the welcome which was given to the different numbers as they appeared. Though the story is vague and wandering, clearly commenced without any idea of an ending, yet there is something in the telling which makes every portion of it perfect in itself. There are absurdities in it which would not be admitted to anyone who had not a peculiar gift of making even his absurdities delightful. No school-girl who ever lived would have thrown back her gift-book, as Rebecca did the "dixonary," out of the carriage window as she was taken away from school. But who does not love that scene with which the novel commences? How could such a girl as Amelia Osborne have got herself into such society as that in which we see her at Vauxhall? But we forgive

it all because of the telling. And then there is that crowning absurdity of Sir Pitt Crawley and his establishment.

I never could understand how Thackeray in his first serious attempt could have dared to subject himself and Sir Pitt Crawley to the critics of the time. Sir Pitt is a baronet, a man of large property, and in Parliament, to whom Becky Sharp goes as a governess at the end of a delightful visit with her friend Amelia Sedley, on leaving Miss Pinkerton's school. The Sedley carriage takes her to Sir Pitt's door. "When the bell was rung a head appeared between the interstices of the dining-room shutters, and the door was opened by a man in drab breeches and gaiters, with a dirty old coat, a foul old neckcloth lashed round his bristly neck, a shining bald head, a leering red face, a pair of twinkling gray eyes, and a mouth perpetually on the grin.

"'This Sir Pitt Crawley's?' says John from the box.

"'E'es,' says the man at the door, with a nod.

"'Hand down these 'ere trunks there,' said John.

"'Hand 'em down yourself,' said the porter."

But John on the box declines to do this, as he cannot leave his horses.

"The bald-headed man, taking his hands out of his breeches' pockets, advanced on this summons, and throwing Miss Sharp's trunk over his shoulder, carried it into the house." Then Becky is shown into the house, and a dismantled dining-room is described, into which she is led by the dirty man with the trunk.

Two kitchen chairs, and a round table, and an attenuated old poker and tongs, were, however, gathered round the fireplace, as was a saucepan over a feeble, sputtering fire. There was a bit of cheese and bread and a tin candlestick on the table, and a little black porter in a pint pot.

“Had your dinner, I suppose?” This was said by him of the bald head. “It is not too warm for you? Like a drop of beer?”

“Where is Sir Pitt Crawley?” said Miss Sharp, majestically.

“He, he! I’m Sir Pitt Crawley. Rek’lect you owe me a pint for bringing down your luggage. He, he! ask Tinker if I ain’t.”

The lady addressed as Mrs. Tinker at this moment made her appearance, with a pipe and a paper of tobacco, for which she had been despatched a minute before Miss Sharp’s arrival; and she handed the articles over to Sir Pitt, who had taken his seat by the fire.

“Where’s the farden?” said he. “I gave you three half-pence; where’s the change, old Tinker?”

“There,” replied Mrs. Tinker, flinging down the coin. “It’s only baronets as cares about farthings.”

Sir Pitt Crawley has always been to me a stretch of audacity which I have been unable to understand. But it has been accepted; and from this commencement of Sir Pitt Crawley have grown the wonderful characters of the Crawley family — old Miss Crawley, the worldly, wicked, pleasure-loving aunt; the Rev. Bute Crawley and his wife, who are quite as worldly; the sanctimonious elder son, who in truth is not less so; and Rawdon, who ultimately becomes Becky’s husband—who is the bad hero of the book, as Dobbin is the good hero. They are admirable; but it is quite clear that Thackeray had known nothing of what was coming about them when he caused Sir Pitt to eat his tripe with Mrs. Tinker in the London dining-room.

There is a double story running through the book, the parts of which are but lightly woven together, of which the former tells us the life and adventures of that singular young woman, Becky Sharp; and the other the troubles and ultimate success of our noble hero, Captain Dobbin. Though it be true that readers prefer, or pretend to prefer, the romantic to the common in their novels, and complain of pages which are defiled with that which is low, yet I find

that the absurd, the ludicrous, and even the evil, leave more impression behind them than the grand, the beautiful, or even the good. Dominie Sampson, Dugald Dalgetty, and Bothwell are, I think, more remembered than Fergus Mac-Ivor, than Ivanhoe himself, or Mr. Butler the minister. It certainly came to pass that, in spite of the critics, Becky Sharp became the first attraction in *Vanity Fair*. When we speak now of *Vanity Fair*, it is always to Becky that our thoughts recur. She has made a position for herself in the world of fiction, and is one of our established personages.

I have already said how she left school, throwing the "dixonary" out of the window, like dust from her feet, and was taken to spend a few halcyon weeks with her friend Amelia Sedley, at the Sedley mansion in Russell Square. There she meets a brother Sedley home from India—the immortal Jos—at whom she began to set her hitherto untried cap. Here we become acquainted both with the Sedley and with the Osborne families, with all their domestic affections and domestic snobbery, and have to confess that the snobbery is stronger than the affection. As we desire to love Amelia Sedley, we wish that the people around her were less vulgar or less selfish—especially we wish it in regard to that handsome young fellow, George Osborne, whom she loves with her whole heart. But with Jos Sedley we are inclined to be content, though he be fat, purse-proud, awkward, a drunkard, and a coward, because we do not want anything better for Becky. Becky does not want anything better for herself, because the man has money. She has been born a pauper. She knows herself to be but ill qualified to set up as a beauty—though by dint of cleverness she does succeed in that afterwards. She has no advantages in regard to friends or family as

she enters life. She must earn her bread for herself. Young as she is, she loves money, and has a great idea of the power of money. Therefore, though Jos is distasteful at all points, she instantly makes her attack. She fails, however, at any rate for the present. She never becomes his wife, but at last she succeeds in getting some of his money. But before that time comes she has many a suffering to endure, and many a triumph to enjoy.

She goes to Sir Pitt Crawley as governess for his second family, and is taken down to Queen's Crawley in the country. There her cleverness prevails, even with the baronet, of whom I have just given Thackeray's portrait. She keeps his accounts, and writes his letters, and helps him to save money; she reads with the elder sister books they ought not to have read; she flatters the sanctimonious son. In point of fact, she becomes all in all at Queen's Crawley, so that Sir Pitt himself falls in love with her—for there is reason to think that Sir Pitt may soon become again a widower. But there also came down to the baronet's house, on an occasion of general entertaining, Captain Rawdon Crawley. Of course Becky sets her cap at him, and of course succeeds. She always succeeds. Though she is only the governess, he insists upon dancing with her, to the neglect of all the young ladies of the neighbourhood. They continue to walk together by moonlight—or starlight—the great, heavy, stupid, half-tipsy dragoon, and the intriguing, covetous, altogether unprincipled young woman. And the two young people absolutely come to love one another in their way—the heavy, stupid, fuddled dragoon, and the false, covetous, altogether unprincipled young woman.

The fat aunt Crawley is a maiden lady, very rich, and Becky quite succeeds in gaining the rich aunt by her

wiles. The aunt becomes so fond of Becky down in the country, that when she has to return to her own house in town, sick from over-eating, she cannot be happy without taking Becky with her. So Becky is installed in the house in London, having been taken away abruptly from her pupils, to the great dismay of the old lady's long-established resident companion. They all fall in love with her; she makes herself so charming, she is so clever; she can even, by help of a little care in dressing, become so picturesque! As all this goes on, the reader feels what a great personage is Miss Rebecca Sharp.

Lady Crawley dies down in the country, while Becky is still staying with his sister, who will not part with her. Sir Pitt at once rushes up to town, before the funeral, looking for consolation where only he can find it. Becky brings him down word from his sister's room that the old lady is too ill to see him.

"So much the better," Sir Pitt answered: "I want to see you, Miss Sharp. I want you back at Queen's Crawley, miss," the baronet said. His eyes had such a strange look, and were fixed upon her so stedfastly that Rebecca Sharp began almost to tremble. Then she half promises, talks about the dear children, and angles with the old man. "I tell you I want you," he says; "I'm going back to the veneral, will you come back?—yes or no?"

"I daren't. I don't think—it wouldn't be right—to be alone—with you, sir," Becky said, seemingly in great agitation.

"I say again, I want you. I can't get on without you. I didn't see what it was till you went away. The house all goes wrong. It's not the same place. All my accounts has got muddled again. You must come back. Do come back. Dear Becky, do come."

"Come—as what, sir?" Rebecca gasped out.

"Come as Lady Crawley, if you like. There, will that zatisfy you? Come back and be my wife. You're vit for it. Birth be hanged. You're as good a lady as ever I see. You've got more brains in your little vinger than any baronet's wife in the country.

Will you come? Yes or no?" Rebecca is startled, but the old man goes on. "I'll make you happy; zee if I don't. You shall do what you like, spend what you like, and have it all your own way. I'll make you a settlement. I'll do everything regular. Look here," and the old man fell down on his knees and leered at her like a satyr.

But Rebecca, though she had been angling, angling for favour and love and power, had not expected this. For once in her life she loses her presence of mind, and exclaims: "Oh, Sir Pitt; oh, sir; I—I'm married already!" She has married Rawdon Crawley, Sir Pitt's younger son, Miss Crawley's favourite among those of her family who are looking for her money. But she keeps her secret for the present, and writes a charming letter to the Captain: "Dearest,—Something tells me that we shall conquer. You shall leave that odious regiment. Quit gaming, racing, and be a good boy, and we shall all live in Park Lane, and *ma tante* shall leave us all her money." *Ma tante's* money has been in her mind all through, but yet she loves him.

"Suppose the old lady doesn't come to," Rawdon said to his little wife as they sat together in the snug little Brompton lodgings. She had been trying the new piano all the morning. The new gloves fitted her to a nicety. The new shawl became her wonderfully. The new rings glittered on her little hands, and the new watch ticked at her waist.

"*I'll* make your fortune," she said; and Delilah patted Samson's cheek.

"You can do anything," he said, kissing the little hand. "By Jove you can! and we'll drive down to the Star and Garter and dine, by Jove!"

They were neither of them quite heartless at that moment, nor did Rawdon ever become quite bad. Then follow the adventures of Becky as a married woman, through



all of which there is a glimmer of love for her stupid husband, while it is the real purpose of her heart to get money how she may—by her charms, by her wit, by her lies, by her readiness. She makes love to everyone—even to her sanctimonious brother-in-law, who becomes Sir Pitt in his time—and always succeeds. But in her love-making there is nothing of love. She gets hold of that well-remembered old reprobate, the Marquis of Steyne, who possesses the two valuable gifts of being very dissolute and very rich, and from him she obtains money and jewels to her heart's desire. The abominations of Lord Steyne are depicted in the strongest language of which *Vanity Fair* admits. The reader's hair stands almost on end in horror at the wickedness of the two wretches—at her desire for money, sheer money; and his for wickedness, sheer wickedness. Then her husband finds her out—poor Rawdon! who with all his faults and thick-headed stupidity, has become absolutely entranced by the wiles of his little wife. He is carried off to a sponging-house, in order that he may be out of the way, and, on escaping unexpectedly from thralldom, finds the lord in his wife's drawing-room. Whereupon he thrashes the old lord, nearly killing him; takes away the plunder which he finds on his wife's person, and hurries away to seek assistance as to further revenge;—for he is determined to shoot the marquis, or to be shot. He goes to one Captain Macmurdo, who is to act as his second, and there he pours out his heart. “You don't know how fond I was of that one,” Rawdon said, half-inarticulately. “Damme, I followed her like a footman! I gave up everything I had to her. I'm a beggar because I would marry her. By Jove, sir, I've pawned my own watch to get her anything she fancied. And she—she's been making a purse for herself all the time, and

grudged me a hundred pounds to get me out of quod!" His friend alleges that the wife may be innocent after all. "It may be so," Rawdon exclaimed, sadly; "but this don't look very innocent!" And he showed the captain the thousand-pound note which he had found in Becky's pocket-book.

But the marquis can do better than fight; and Rawdon, in spite of his true love, can do better than follow the quarrel up to his own undoing. The marquis, on the spur of the moment, gets the lady's husband appointed governor of Coventry Island, with a salary of three thousand pounds a year; and poor Rawdon at last condescends to accept the appointment. He will not see his wife again, but he makes her an allowance out of his income.

In arranging all this, Thackeray is enabled to have a side blow at the British way of distributing patronage—for the favour of which he was afterwards himself a candidate. He quotes as follows from *The Royalist* newspaper: "We hear that the governorship"—of Coventry Island—"has been offered to Colonel Rawdon Crawley, C.B., a distinguished Waterloo officer. We need not only men of acknowledged bravery, but men of administrative talents to superintend the affairs of our colonies; and we have no doubt that the gentleman selected by the Colonial Office to fill the lamented vacancy which has occurred at Coventry Island is admirably calculated for the post." The reader, however, is aware that the officer in question cannot write a sentence or speak two words correctly.

Our heroine's adventures are carried on much further, but they cannot be given here in detail. To the end she is the same—utterly false, selfish, covetous, and successful. To have made such a woman really in love would have

been a mistake. Her husband she likes best—because he is, or was, her own. But there is no man so foul, so wicked, so unattractive, but that she can fawn over him for money and jewels. There are women to whom nothing is nasty, either in person, language, scenes, actions, or principle—and Becky is one of them; and yet she is herself attractive. A most wonderful sketch, for the perpetration of which all Thackeray's power of combined indignation and humour was necessary!

The story of Amelia and her two lovers, George Osborne and Captain, or, as he came afterwards to be, Major, and Colonel Dobbin, is less interesting, simply because goodness and eulogy are less exciting than wickedness and censure. Amelia is a true, honest-hearted, thoroughly English young woman, who loves her love because he is grand—to her eyes—and loving him, loves him with all her heart. Readers have said that she is silly, only because she is not heroic. I do not know that she is more silly than many young ladies whom we who are old have loved in our youth, or than those whom our sons are loving at the present time. Readers complain of Amelia because she is absolutely true to nature. There are no Raffaellistic touches, no added graces, no divine romance. She is feminine all over, and British—loving, true, thoroughly unselfish, yet with a taste for having things comfortable, forgiving, quite capable of jealousy, but prone to be appeased at once, at the first kiss; quite convinced that her lover, her husband, her children are the people in all the world to whom the greatest consideration is due. Such a one is sure to be the dupe of a Becky Sharp, should a Becky Sharp come in her way—as is the case with so many sweet Amelias whom we have known. But in a matter of love she is sound enough and sensible enough—and

she is as true as steel. I know no trait in Amelia which a man would be ashamed to find in his own daughter.

She marries her George Osborne, who, to tell the truth of him, is but a poor kind of fellow, though he is a brave soldier. He thinks much of his own person, and is selfish. Thackeray puts in a touch or two here and there by which he is made to be odious. He would rather give a present to himself than to the girl who loved him. Nevertheless, when her father is ruined he marries her, and he fights bravely at Waterloo, and is killed. "No more firing was heard at Brussels. The pursuit rolled miles away. Darkness came down on the field and the city; and Amelia was praying for George, who was lying on his face, dead, with a bullet through his heart."

Then follows the long courtship of Dobbin, the true hero—he who has been the friend of George since their old school-days; who has lived with him and served him, and has also loved Amelia. But he has loved her—as one man may love another—solely with a view to the profit of his friend. He has known all along that George and Amelia have been engaged to each other as boy and girl. George would have neglected her, but Dobbin would not allow it. George would have jilted the girl who loved him, but Dobbin would not let him. He had nothing to get for himself, but loving her as he did, it was the work of his life to get for her all that she wanted.

George is shot at Waterloo, and then come fifteen years of widowhood—fifteen years during which Becky is carrying on her manœuvres—fifteen years during which Amelia cannot bring herself to accept the devotion of the old captain, who becomes at last a colonel. But at the end she is won. "The vessel is in port. He has got the prize he has been trying for all his life. The bird has

come in at last. There it is, with its head on its shoulder, billing and cooing clean up to his heart, with soft, outstretched fluttering wings. This is what he has asked for every day and hour for eighteen years. This is what he has pined after. Here it is—the summit, the end, the last page of the third volume.”

The reader as he closes the book has on his mind a strong conviction, the strongest possible conviction, that among men George is as weak and Dobbin as noble as any that he has met in literature; and that among women Amelia is as true and Becky as vile as any he has encountered. Of so much he will be conscious. In addition to this he will unconsciously have found that every page he has read will have been of interest to him. There has been no padding, no longueurs; every bit will have had its weight with him. And he will find too at the end, if he will think of it—though readers, I fear, seldom think much of this in regard to books they have read—that the lesson taught in every page has been good. There may be details of evil painted so as to disgust—painted almost too plainly—but none painted so as to allure.

## CHAPTER IV.

### PENDENNIS AND THE NEWCOMES.

THE absence of the heroic was, in Thackeray, so palpable to Thackeray himself that in his original preface to *Pendennis*, when he began to be aware that his reputation was made, he tells his public what they may expect and what they may not, and makes his joking complaint of the readers of his time because they will not endure with patience the true picture of a natural man. "Even the gentlemen of our age," he says—adding that the story of *Pendennis* is an attempt to describe one of them, just as he is—"even those we cannot show as they are with the notorious selfishness of their time and their education. Since the author of *Tom Jones* was buried, no writer of fiction among us has been permitted to depict to his utmost power a MAN. We must shape him, and give him a certain conventional temper." Then he rebukes his audience because they will not listen to the truth. "You will not hear what moves in the real world, what passes in society, in the clubs, colleges, mess-rooms—what is the life and talk of your sons." You want the Raffaellistic touch, or that of some painter of horrors equally removed from the truth. I tell you how a man really does act—as did Fielding with *Tom Jones*—but it does not satisfy you. You will not sympathise with this young man of

mine, this Pendennis, because he is neither angel nor imp. If it be so, let it be so. I will not paint for you angels or imps, because I do not see them. The young man of the day, whom I do see, and of whom I know the inside and the out thoroughly, him I have painted for you; and here he is, whether you like the picture or not. This is what Thackeray meant, and, having this in his mind, he produced *Pendennis*.

The object of a novel should be to instruct in morals while it amuses. I cannot think but that every novelist who has thought much of his art will have realised as much as that for himself. Whether this may best be done by the transcendental or by the common-place is the question which it more behoves the reader than the author to answer, because the author may be fairly sure that he who can do the one will not, probably cannot, do the other. If a lad be only five feet high, he does not try to enlist in the Guards. Thackeray complains that many ladies have "remonstrated and subscribers left him," because of his realistic tendency. Nevertheless he has gone on with his work, and, in *Pendennis*, has painted a young man as natural as Tom Jones. Had he expended himself in the attempt, he could not have drawn a Master of Ravenswood.

It has to be admitted that Pendennis is not a fine fellow. He is not as weak, as selfish, as untrustworthy as that George Osborne whom Amelia married in *Vanity Fair*; but nevertheless, he is weak, and selfish, and untrustworthy. He is not such a one as a father would wish to see his son, or a mother to welcome as a lover for her daughter. But then, fathers are so often doomed to find their sons not all that they wish, and mothers to see their girls falling in love with young men who are not

Paladins. In our individual lives we are contented to endure an admixture of evil, which we should resent if imputed to us in the general. We presume ourselves to be truth-speaking, noble in our sentiments, generous in our actions, modest and unselfish, chivalrous and devoted. But we forgive and pass over in silence a few delinquencies among ourselves. What boy at school ever is a coward — in the general? What gentleman ever tells a lie? What young lady is greedy? We take it for granted, as though they were fixed rules in life, that our boys from our public schools look us in the face and are manly; that our gentlemen tell the truth as a matter of course; and that our young ladies are refined and unselfish. Thackeray is always protesting that it is not so, and that no good is to be done by blinking the truth. He knows that we have our little home experiences. Let us have the facts out, and mend what is bad if we can. This novel of *Pendennis* is one of his loudest protests to this effect.

I will not attempt to tell the story of *Pendennis*, how his mother loved him, how he first came to be brought up together with Laura Bell, how he thrashed the other boys when he was a boy, and how he fell in love with Miss Fotheringay, née Costigan, and was determined to marry her while he was still a hobbledehoy, how he went up to Boniface, that well-known college at Oxford, and there did no good, spending money which he had not got, and learning to gamble. The English gentleman, as we know, never lies; but *Pendennis* is not quite truthful; when the college tutor, thinking that he hears the rattling of dice, makes his way into Pen's room, Pen and his two companions are found with three *Homers* before them, and Pen asks the tutor with great gravity: "What was the present condition of the river Scamander, and whether it was nav-



igable or no?" He tells his mother that, during a certain vacation he must stay up and read, instead of coming home—but, nevertheless, he goes up to London to amuse himself. The reader is soon made to understand that, though Pen may be a fine gentleman, he is not trustworthy. But he repents and comes home, and kisses his mother; only, alas! he will always be kissing somebody else also.

The story of the Amorys and the Claverings, and that wonderful French cook M. Alcide Mirobolant, forms one of those delightful digressions which Thackeray scatters through his novels rather than weaves into them. They generally have but little to do with the story itself, and are brought in only as giving scope for some incident to the real hero or heroine. But in this digression Pen is very much concerned indeed, for he is brought to the very verge of matrimony with that peculiarly disagreeable lady Miss Amory. He does escape at last, but only within a few pages of the end, when we are made unhappy by the lady's victory over that poor young sinner Foker, with whom we have all come to sympathise, in spite of his vulgarity and fast propensities. She would to the last fain have married Pen, in whom she believes, thinking that he would make a name for her. "*Il me faut des émotions,*" says Blanche. Whereupon the author, as he leaves her, explains the nature of this Miss Amory's feelings. "For this young lady was not able to carry out any emotion to the full, but had a sham enthusiasm, a sham hatred, a sham love, a sham taste, a sham grief; each of which flared and shone very vehemently for an instant, but subsided and gave place to the next sham emotion." Thackeray, when he drew this portrait, must certainly have had some special young lady in his view.

But though we are made unhappy for Foker, Foker too escapes at last, and Blanche, with her emotions, marries that very doubtful nobleman Comte Montmorenci de Valentinois.

But all this of Miss Amory is but an episode. The purport of the story is the way in which the hero is made to enter upon the world, subject as he has been to the sweet teaching of his mother, and subject as he is made to be to the worldly lessons of his old uncle the major. Then he is ill, and nearly dies, and his mother comes up to nurse him. And there is his friend Warrington, of whose family down in Suffolk we shall have heard something when we have read *The Virginians*—one, I think, of the finest characters, as it is certainly one of the most touching, that Thackeray ever drew. Warrington, and Pen's mother, and Laura are our hero's better angels—angels so good as to make us wonder that a creature so weak should have had such angels about him; though we are driven to confess that their affection and loyalty for him are natural. There is a melancholy beneath the roughness of Warrington, and a feminine softness combined with the reticent manliness of the man, which have endeared him to readers beyond perhaps any character in the book. Major Pendennis has become immortal. Selfish, worldly, false, padded, caring altogether for things mean and poor in themselves; still the reader likes him. It is not quite all for himself. To Pen he is good—to Pen, who is the head of his family, and to come after him as the Pendennis of the day. To Pen and to Pen's mother he is beneficent after his lights. In whatever he undertakes, it is so contrived that the reader shall in some degree sympathise with him. And so it is with poor old Costigan, the drunken Irish captain, Miss

Fotheringay's papa. He was not a pleasant person. "We have witnessed the *déshabille* of Major Pendennis," says our author; "will any one wish to be valet-de-chambre to our other hero, Costigan? It would seem that the captain, before issuing from his bedroom, scented himself with otto of whisky." Yet there is a kindness about him which softens our hearts, though in truth he is very careful that the kindness shall always be shown to himself.

Among these people Pen makes his way to the end of the novel, coming near to shipwreck on various occasions, and always deserving the shipwreck which he has almost encountered. Then there will arise the question whether it might not have been better that he should be altogether shipwrecked, rather than housed comfortably with such a wife as Laura, and left to that enjoyment of happiness forever after, which is the normal heaven prepared for heroes and heroines who have done their work well through three volumes. It is almost the only instance in all Thackeray's works in which this state of bliss is reached. George Osborne, who is the beautiful lover in *Vanity Fair*, is killed almost before our eyes, on the field of battle, and we feel that Nemesis has with justice taken hold of him. Poor old Dobbin does marry the widow, after fifteen years of further service, when we know him to be a middle-aged man and her a middle-aged woman. That glorious Paradise of which I have spoken requires a freshness which can hardly be attributed to the second marriage of a widow who has been fifteen years mourning for her first husband. Clive Newcome, "the first young man," if we may so call him, of the novel which I shall mention just now, is carried so far beyond his matrimonial elysium that we are allowed to

see too plainly how far from true may be those promises of hymeneal happiness forever after. The cares of married life have settled down heavily upon his young head before we leave him. He not only marries, but loses his wife, and is left a melancholy widower with his son. Esmond and Beatrix certainly reach no such elysium as that of which we are speaking. But Pen, who surely deserved a Nemesis, though perhaps not one so black as that demanded by George Osborne's delinquencies, is treated as though he had been passed through the fire, and had come out—if not pure gold, still gold good enough for goldsmiths. "And what sort of a husband will this Pendennis be?" This is the question asked by the author himself at the end of the novel; feeling, no doubt, some hesitation as to the justice of what he had just done. "And what sort of a husband will this Pendennis be?" many a reader will ask, doubting the happiness of such a marriage and the future of Laura. The querists are referred to that lady herself, who, seeing his faults and wayward moods—seeing and owning that there are better men than he—loves him always with the most constant affection. The assertion could be made with perfect confidence, but is not to the purpose. That Laura's affection should be constant, no one would doubt; but more than that is wanted for happiness. How about Pendennis and his constancy?

*The Newcomes*, which I bracket in this chapter with *Pendennis*, was not written till after *Esmond*, and appeared between that novel and *The Virginians*, which was a sequel to *Esmond*. It is supposed to be edited by Pen, whose own adventures we have just completed, and is commenced by that celebrated night passed by Colonel Newcome and his boy Clive at the Cave of Harmony,

during which the colonel is at first so pleasantly received and so genially entertained, but from which he is at last banished, indignant at the iniquities of our drunken old friend Captain Costigan, with whom we had become intimate in Pen's own memoirs. The boy Clive is described as being probably about sixteen. At the end of the story he has run through the adventures of his early life, and is left a melancholy man, a widower, one who has suffered the extremity of misery from a stepmother, and who is wrapped up in the only son that is left to him—as had been the case with his father at the beginning of the novel. *The Newcomes*, therefore, like Thackeray's other tales, is rather a slice from the biographical memoirs of a family, than a romance or novel in itself.

It is full of satire from the first to the last page. Every word of it seems to have been written to show how vile and poor a place this world is; how prone men are to deceive, how prone to be deceived. There is a scene in which "his Excellency Rummun Loll, otherwise his Highness Rummun Loll," is introduced to Colonel Newcome—or rather presented—for the two men had known each other before. All London was talking of Rummun Loll, taking him for an Indian prince, but the colonel, who had served in India, knew better. Rummun Loll was no more than a merchant, who had made a precarious fortune by doubtful means. All the girls, nevertheless, are running after his Excellency. "He's known to have two wives already in India," says Barnes Newcome; "but, by gad, for a settlement, I believe some of the girls here would marry him." We have a delightful illustration of the London girls, with their bare necks and shoulders, sitting round Rummun Loll and worshipping him as he reposes on his low settee. There are a dozen of them so enchanted that the men who

wish to get a sight of the Rummun are quite kept at a distance. This is satire on the women. A few pages on we come upon a clergyman who is no more real than Rummun Loll. The clergyman, Charles Honeyman, had married the colonel's sister and had lost his wife, and now the brothers-in-law meet. "Poor, poor Emma!" exclaimed the ecclesiastic, casting his eyes towards the chandelier and passing a white cambric pocket-handkerchief gracefully before them. No man in London understood the ring business or the pocket-handkerchief business better, or smothered his emotion more beautifully. "In the gayest moments, in the giddiest throng of fashion, the thoughts of the past will rise; the departed will be among us still. But this is not the strain wherewith to greet the friend newly arrived on our shores. How it rejoices me to behold you in old England!" And so the satirist goes on with Mr. Honeyman the clergyman. Mr. Honeyman the clergyman has been already mentioned, in that extract made in our first chapter from *Lovel the Widower*. It was he who assisted another friend, "with his wheedling tongue," in inducing Thackeray to purchase that "neat little literary paper"—called then *The Museum*, but which was in truth *The National Standard*. In describing Barnes Newcome, the colonel's relative, Thackeray in the same scene attacks the sharpness of the young men of business of the present day. There were, or were to be, some transactions with Rummun Loll, and Barnes Newcome, being in doubt, asks the colonel a question or two as to the certainty of the Rummun's money, much to the colonel's disgust. "The young man of business had dropped his drawl or his languor, and was speaking quite unaffectedly, good-naturedly, and selfishly. Had you talked to him for a week you would not have made him understand the

scorn and loathing with which the colonel regarded him. Here was a young fellow as keen as the oldest curmudgeon—a lad with scarce a beard to his chin, that would pursue his bond as rigidly as Shylock.” “Barnes Newcome never missed a church,” he goes on, “or dressing for dinner. He never kept a tradesman waiting for his money. He seldom drank too much, and never was late for business, or huddled over his toilet, however brief his sleep or severe his headache. In a word, he was as scrupulously whited as any sepulchre in the whole bills of mortality.” Thackeray had lately seen some Barnes Newcome when he wrote that.

It is all satire; but there is generally a touch of pathos even through the satire. It is satire when Miss Quigley, the governess in Park Street, falls in love with the old colonel after some dim fashion of her own. “When she is walking with her little charges in the Park, faint signals of welcome appear on her wan cheeks. She knows the dear colonel amidst a thousand horsemen.” The colonel had drunk a glass of wine with her after his stately fashion, and the foolish old maid thinks too much of it. Then we are told how she knits purses for him, “as she sits alone in the schoolroom—high up in that lone house, when the little ones are long since asleep—before her dismal little tea-tray, and her little desk containing her mother’s letters and her mementoes of home.” Miss Quigley is an ass; but we are made to sympathise entirely with the ass, because of that morsel of pathos as to her mother’s letters.

Clive Newcome, our hero, who is a second Pen, but a better fellow, is himself a satire on young men—on young men who are idle and ambitious at the same time. He is a painter; but, instead of being proud of his art, is half

ashamed of it—because not being industrious he has not, while yet young, learned to excel. He is “doing” a portrait of Mrs. Pendennis, Laura, and thus speaks of his business. “No. 666”—he is supposed to be quoting from the catalogue of the Royal Academy for the year—“No. 666. Portrait of Joseph Muggins, Esq., Newcome, George Street. No. 979. Portrait of Mrs. Muggins on her gray pony, Newcome. No. 579. Portrait of Joseph Muggins, Esq.’s dog Toby, Newcome. This is what I am fit for. These are the victories I have set myself on achieving. Oh, Mrs. Pendennis! isn’t it humiliating? Why isn’t there a war? Why haven’t I a genius? There is a painter who lives hard by, and who begs me to come and look at his work. He is in the Muggins line too. He gets his canvases with a good light upon them; excludes the contemplation of other objects; stands beside his picture in an attitude himself; and thinks that he and they are masterpieces. Oh me, what drivelling wretches we are! Fame!—except that of just the one or two—what’s the use of it?” In all of which Thackeray is speaking his own feelings about himself as well as the world at large. What’s the use of it all? Oh *vanitas vanitatum!* Oh vanity and vexation of spirit! “So Clive Newcome,” he says afterwards, “lay on a bed of down and tossed and tumbled there. He went to fine dinners, and sat silent over them; rode fine horses, and black care jumped up behind the moody horseman.” As I write this I have before me a letter from Thackeray to a friend describing his own success when *Vanity Fair* was coming out, full of the same feeling. He is making money, but he spends it so fast that he never has any; and as for the opinions expressed on his books, he cares little for what he hears. There was always present to him a feeling of black care seated be-



hind the horseman—and would have been equally so had there been no real care present to him. A sardonic melancholy was the characteristic most common to him—which, however, was relieved by an always present capacity for instant frolic. It was these attributes combined which made him of all satirists the most humorous, and of all humorists the most satirical. It was these that produced the Osbornes, the Dobbins, the Pens, the Clives, and the Newcomes, whom, when he loved them the most, he could not save himself from describing as mean and unworthy. A somewhat heroic hero of romance—such a one, let us say, as Waverley, or Lovel in *The Antiquary*, or Morton in *Old Mortality*—was revolting to him, as lacking those foibles which human nature seemed to him to demand.

The story ends with two sad tragedies, neither of which would have been demanded by the story, had not such sadness been agreeable to the author's own idiosyncrasy. The one is the ruin of the old colonel's fortunes, he having allowed himself to be enticed into bubble speculations; and the other is the loss of all happiness, and even comfort, to Clive the hero, by the abominations of his mother-in-law. The woman is so iniquitous, and so tremendous in her iniquities, that she rises to tragedy. Who does not know Mrs. Mack the Campaigner? Why at the end of his long story should Thackeray have married his hero to so lackadaisical a heroine as poor little Rosey, or brought on the stage such a she-demon as Rosey's mother? But there is the Campaigner in all her vigour, a marvel of strength of composition—one of the most vividly drawn characters in fiction—but a woman so odious that one is induced to doubt whether she should have been depicted.

The other tragedy is altogether of a different kind, and

though unnecessary to the story, and contrary to that practice of story-telling which seems to demand that calamities to those personages with whom we are to sympathise should not be brought in at the close of a work of fiction, is so beautifully told that no lover of Thackeray's work would be willing to part with it. The old colonel, as we have said, is ruined by speculation, and in his ruin is brought to accept the alms of the brotherhood of the Grey Friars. Then we are introduced to the Charter House, at which, as most of us know, there still exists a brotherhood of the kind. He dons the gown—this old colonel, who had always been comfortable in his means, and latterly apparently rich—and occupies the single room, and eats the doled bread, and among his poor brothers sits in the chapel of his order. The description is perhaps as fine as anything that Thackeray ever did. The gentleman is still the gentleman, with all the pride of gentry;—but not the less is he the humble bedesman, aware that he is living upon charity, not made to grovel by any sense of shame, but knowing that, though his normal pride may be left to him, an outward demeanour of humility is befitting.

And then he dies. “At the usual evening hour the chapel bell began to toll, and Thomas Newcome's hands outside the bed feebly beat time—and just as the last bell struck, a peculiar sweet smile shone over his face, and he lifted up his head a little, and quickly said, ‘Adsum’—and fell back. It was the word we used at school when names were called; and, lo, he whose heart was as that of a little child had answered to his name, and stood in the presence of his Maker!”

## CHAPTER V.

### ESMOND AND THE VIRGINIANS.

THE novel with which we are now going to deal I regard as the greatest work that Thackeray did. Though I do not hesitate to compare himself with himself, I will make no comparison between him and others; I therefore abstain from assigning to *Esmond* any special niche among prose fictions in the English language, but I rank it so high as to justify me in placing him among the small number of the highest class of English novelists. Much as I think of *Barry Lyndon* and *Vanity Fair*, I cannot quite say this of them; but, as a chain is not stronger than its weakest link, so is a poet, or a dramatist, or a novelist to be placed in no lower level than that which he has attained by his highest sustained flight. The excellence which has been reached here Thackeray achieved, without doubt, by giving a greater amount of forethought to the work he had before him than had been his wont. When we were young we used to be told, in our house at home, that "elbow-grease" was the one essential necessary to getting a tough piece of work well done. If a mahogany table was to be made to shine, it was elbow-grease that the operation needed. Forethought is the elbow-grease which a novelist—or poet—or dramatist—requires. It is not only his plot that has to be turned and re-turned in his mind, not his

plot chiefly, but he has to make himself sure of his situations, of his characters, of his effects, so that when the time comes for hitting the nail he may know where to hit it on the head—so that he may himself understand the passion, the calmness, the virtues, the vices, the rewards and punishments which he means to explain to others—so that his proportions shall be correct, and he be saved from the absurdity of devoting two-thirds of his book to the beginning, or two-thirds to the completion of his task. It is from want of this special labour, more frequently than from intellectual deficiency, that the tellers of stories fail so often to hit their nails on the head. To think of a story is much harder work than to write it. The author can sit down with the pen in his hand for a given time, and produce a certain number of words. That is comparatively easy, and if he have a conscience in regard to his task, work will be done regularly. But to think it over as you lie in bed, or walk about, or sit cosily over your fire, to turn it all in your thoughts, and make the things fit—that requires elbow-grease of the mind. The arrangement of the words is as though you were walking simply along a road. The arrangement of your story is as though you were carrying a sack of flour while you walked. Fielding had carried his sack of flour before he wrote *Tom Jones*, and Scott his before he produced *Ivanhoe*. So had Thackeray done—a very heavy sack of flour—in creating *Esmond*. In *Vanity Fair*, in *Pendennis*, and in *The Newcomes*, there was more of that mere wandering in which no heavy burden was borne. The richness of the author's mind, the beauty of his language, his imagination and perception of character, are all there. For that which was lovely he has shown his love, and for the hateful his hatred; but, nevertheless, they are comparatively idle

books. His only work, as far as I can judge them, in which there is no touch of idleness, is *Esmond*. *Barry Lyndon* is consecutive, and has the well-sustained purpose of exhibiting a finished rascal; but *Barry Lyndon* is not quite the same from beginning to end. All his full-fledged novels, except *Esmond*, contain rather strings of incidents and memoirs of individuals, than a completed story. But *Esmond* is a whole from beginning to end, with its tale well told, its purpose developed, its moral brought home—and its nail hit well on the head and driven in.

I told Thackeray once that it was not only his best work, but so much the best, that there was none second to it. "That was what I intended," he said, "but I have failed. Nobody reads it. After all, what does it matter?" he went on after awhile. "If they like anything, one ought to be satisfied. After all, *Esmond* was a prig." Then he laughed and changed the subject, not caring to dwell on thoughts painful to him. The elbow-grease of thinking was always distasteful to him, and had no doubt been so when he conceived and carried out this work.

To the ordinary labour necessary for such a novel he added very much by his resolution to write it in a style different, not only from that which he had made his own, but from that also which belonged to the time. He had devoted himself to the reading of the literature of Queen Anne's reign, and having chosen to throw his story into that period, and to create in it personages who were to be peculiarly concerned with the period, he resolved to use as the vehicle for his story the forms of expression then prevalent. No one who has not tried it can understand how great is the difficulty of mastering a phase of one's own language other than that which habit has made familiar. To write in another language, if the language be suffi-

ciently known, is a much less arduous undertaking. The lad who attempts to write his essay in Ciceronian Latin struggles to achieve a style which is not indeed common to him, but is more common than any other he has become acquainted with in that tongue. But Thackeray in his work had always to remember his Swift, his Steele, and his Addison, and to forget at the same time the modes of expression which the day had adopted. Whether he asked advice on the subject, I do not know. But I feel sure that if he did he must have been counselled against it. Let my reader think what advice he would give to any writer on such a subject. Probably he asked no advice, and would have taken none. No doubt he found himself, at first imperceptibly, gliding into a phraseology which had attractions for his ear, and then probably was so charmed with the peculiarly masculine forms of sentences which thus became familiar to him, that he thought it would be almost as difficult to drop them altogether as altogether to assume the use of them. And if he could do so successfully, how great would be the assistance given to the local colouring which is needed for a novel in prose, the scene of which is thrown far back from the writer's period! Were I to write a poem about *Cœur de Lion*, I should not mar my poem by using the simple language of the day; but if I write a prose story of the time, I cannot altogether avoid some attempt at far-away quaintnesses in language. To call a purse a "gypsire," and to begin your little speeches with "Marry come up," or to finish them with "Quotha," are but poor attempts. But even they have had their effect. Scott did the best he could with his *Cœur de Lion*. When we look to it we find that it was but little; though in his hands it passed for much. "By my troth," said the knight, "thou hast sung well and

heartily, and in high praise of thine order." We doubt whether he achieved any similarity to the language of the time; but still, even in the little which he attempted, there was something of the picturesque. But how much more would be done if in very truth the whole language of a story could be thrown with correctness into the form of expression used at the time depicted?

It was this that Thackeray tried in his *Esmond*, and he has done it almost without a flaw. The time in question is near enough to us, and the literature sufficiently familiar to enable us to judge. Whether folk swore by their troth in the days of King Richard I. we do not know, but when we read Swift's letters, and Addison's papers, or Defoe's novels, we do catch the veritable sounds of Queen Anne's age, and can say for ourselves whether Thackeray has caught them correctly or not. No reader can doubt that he has done so. Nor is the reader ever struck with the affectation of an assumed dialect. The words come as though they had been written naturally—though not natural to the middle of the nineteenth century. It was a *tour de force*, and successful as such a *tour de force* so seldom is. But though Thackeray was successful in adopting the tone he wished to assume, he never quite succeeded, as far as my ear can judge, in altogether dropping it again.

And yet it has to be remembered that though *Esmond* deals with the times of Queen Anne, and "copies the language" of the time, as Thackeray himself says in the dedication, the story is not supposed to have been written till the reign of George II. Esmond in his narrative speaks of Fielding and Hogarth, who did their best work under George II. The idea is that Henry Esmond, the hero, went out to Virginia after the events told, and there wrote

the memoir in the form of an autobiography. The estate of Castlewood, in Virginia, had been given to the Esmond family by Charles II. ; and this Esmond, our hero, finding that expatriation would best suit both his domestic happiness and his political difficulties—as the reader of the book will understand might be the case—settles himself in the colony, and there writes the history of his early life. He retains the manners, and with the manners the language of his youth. He lives among his own people, a country gentleman with a broad domain, mixing but little with the world beyond, and remains an English gentleman of the time of Queen Anne. The story is continued in *The Virginians*, the name given to a record of two lads who were grandsons of Harry Esmond, whose names are Warrington. Before *The Virginians* appeared we had already become acquainted with a scion of that family, the friend of Arthur Pendennis, a younger son of Sir Miles Warrington, of Suffolk. Henry Esmond's daughter had in a previous generation married a younger son of the then baronet. This is mentioned now to show the way in which Thackeray's mind worked afterwards upon the details and characters which he had originated in *Esmond*.

It is not my purpose to tell the story here, but rather to explain the way in which it is written, to show how it differs from other stories, and thus to explain its effect. Harry Esmond, who tells the story, is of course the hero. There are two heroines who equally command our sympathy—Lady Castlewood, the wife of Harry's kinsman, and her daughter Beatrix. Thackeray himself declared the man to be a prig, and he was not altogether wrong. Beatrix, with whom throughout the whole book he is in love, knew him well. "Shall I be frank with you, Harry," she says, when she is engaged to another suitor, "and say that



if you had not been down on your knees and so humble, you might have fared better with me? A woman of my spirit, cousin, is to be won by gallantry, and not by sighs and rueful faces. All the time you are worshipping and singing hymns to me, I know very well I am no goddess." And again: "As for you, you want a woman to bring your slippers and cap, and to sit at your feet and cry, O caro, caro! O bravo! whilst you read your Shakespeares and Miltons and stuff." He was a prig, and the girl he loved knew him, and being quite of another way of thinking herself, would have nothing to say to him in the way of love. But without something of the aptitudes of a prig the character which the author intended could not have been drawn. There was to be courage—military courage—and that propensity to fighting which the tone of the age demanded in a finished gentleman. Esmond, therefore, is ready enough to use his sword. But at the same time he has to live as becomes one whose name is in some degree under a cloud; for though he be not in truth an illegitimate offshoot of the noble family which is his, and though he knows that he is not so, still he has to live as though he were. He becomes a soldier, and it was just then that our army was accustomed "to swear horribly in Flanders." But Esmond likes his books, and cannot swear or drink like other soldiers. Nevertheless he has a sort of liking for fast ways in others, knowing that such are the ways of a gallant cavalier. There is a melancholy over his life which makes him always, to himself and to others, much older than his years. He is well aware that, being as he is, it is impossible that Beatrix should love him. Now and then there is a dash of lightness about him, as though he had taught himself, in his philosophy, that even sorrow may be borne with a smile—as though

there was something in him of the Stoic's doctrine, which made him feel that even disappointed love should not be seen to wound too deep. But still, when he smiles, even when he indulges in some little pleasantry, there is that garb of melancholy over him which always makes a man a prig. But he is a gentleman from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot. Thackeray had let the whole power of his intellect apply itself to a conception of the character of a gentleman. This man is brave, polished, gifted with that old-fashioned courtesy which ladies used to love, true as steel, loyal as faith himself, with a power of self-abnegation which astonishes the criticising reader when he finds such a virtue carried to such an extent without seeming to be unnatural. To draw the picture of a man, and say that he is gifted with all the virtues, is easy enough—easy enough to describe him as performing all the virtues. The difficulty is to put your man on his legs, and make him move about, carrying his virtues with a natural gait, so that the reader shall feel that he is becoming acquainted with flesh and blood, not with a wooden figure. The virtues are all there with Henry Esmond, and the flesh and blood also, so that the reader believes in them. But still there is left a flavour of the character which Thackeray himself tasted when he called his hero a prig.

The two heroines, Lady Castlewood and Beatrix, are mother and daughter, of whom the former is in love with Esmond, and the latter is loved by him. Fault has been found with the story, because of the unnatural rivalry—because it has been felt that a mother's solicitude for her daughter should admit of no such juxtaposition. But the criticism has come, I think, from those who have failed to understand, not from those who have understood the tale; not because they have read it, but because they have not

read it, and have only looked at it or heard of it. Lady Castlewood is perhaps ten years older than the boy Esmond, whom she first finds in her husband's house, and takes as a *protégé*; and from the moment in which she finds that he is in love with her own daughter, she does her best to bring about a marriage between them. Her husband is alive, and though he is a drunken brute—after the manner of lords of that time—she is thoroughly loyal to him. The little touches, of which the woman is herself altogether unconscious, that gradually turn a love for the boy into a love for the man, are told so delicately, that it is only at last that the reader perceives what has in truth happened to the woman. She is angry with him, grateful to him, careful over him, gradually conscious of all his worth, and of all that he does to her and hers, till at last her heart is unable to resist. But then she is a widow;—and Beatrix has declared that her ambition will not allow her to marry so humble a swain, and Esmond has become—as he says of himself when he calls himself “an old gentleman”—“the guardian of all the family,” “fit to be the grandfather of you all.”

The character of Lady Castlewood has required more delicacy in its manipulation than perhaps any other which Thackeray has drawn. There is a mixture in it of self-negation and of jealousy, of gratefulness of heart and of the weary thoughtfulness of age, of occasional sprightliness with deep melancholy, of injustice with a thorough appreciation of the good around her, of personal weakness—as shown always in her intercourse with her children, and of personal strength—as displayed when she vindicates the position of her kinsman Henry to the Duke of Hamilton, who is about to marry Beatrix;—a mixture which has required a master's hand to trace. These con-

traditions are essentially feminine. Perhaps it must be confessed that in the unreasonableness of the woman, the author has intended to bear more harshly on the sex than it deserves. But a true woman will forgive him, because of the truth of Lady Castlewood's heart. Her husband had been killed in a duel, and there were circumstances which had induced her at the moment to quarrel with Harry and to be unjust to him. He had been ill, and had gone away to the wars, and then she had learned the truth, and had been wretched enough. But when he comes back, and she sees him, by chance at first, as the anthem is being sung in the cathedral choir, as she is saying her prayers, her heart flows over with tenderness to him. "I knew you would come back," she said; "and to-day, Henry, in the anthem when they sang it—'When the Lord turned the captivity of Zion we were like them that dream'—I thought, yes, like them that dream—them that dream. And then it went on, 'They that sow in tears shall reap in joy, and he that goeth forth and weepeth shall doubtless come home again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.' I looked up from the book and saw you. I was not surprised when I saw you. I knew you would come, my dear, and saw the gold sunshine round your head." And so it goes on running into expressions of heart-melting tenderness. And yet she herself does not know that her own heart is seeking his with all a woman's love. She is still willing that he should possess Beatrix. "I would call you my son," she says, "sooner than the greatest prince in Europe." But she warns him of the nature of her own girl. "'Tis for my poor Beatrix I tremble, whose headstrong will affrights me, whose jealous temper, and whose vanity no prayers of mine can cure." It is but very gradually that Esmond

becomes aware of the truth. Indeed, he has not become altogether aware of it till the tale closes. The reader does not see that transfer of affection from the daughter to the mother which would fail to reach his sympathy. In the last page of the last chapter it is told that it is so—that Esmond marries Lady Castlewood—but it is not told till all the incidents of the story have been completed.

But of the three characters I have named, Beatrix is the one that has most strongly exercised the writer's powers, and will most interest the reader. As far as outward person is concerned, she is very lovely—so charming that every man that comes near to her submits himself to her attractions and caprices. It is but rarely that a novelist can succeed in impressing his reader with a sense of female loveliness. The attempt is made so frequently—comes so much as a matter of course in every novel that is written, and fails so much as a matter of course, that the reader does not feel the failure. There are things which we do not expect to have done for us in literature, because they are done so seldom. Novelists are apt to describe the rural scenes among which their characters play their parts, but seldom leave any impression of the places described. Even in poetry how often does this occur? The words used are pretty, well chosen, perhaps musical to the ear, and in that way befitting; but unless the spot has violent characteristics of its own, such as Burley's cave or the waterfall of Lodore, no striking portrait is left. Nor are we disappointed as we read, because we have not been taught to expect it to be otherwise. So it is with those word-painted portraits of women, which are so frequently given and so seldom convey any impression. Who has an idea of the outside look of Sophia Western, or Edith Bellen-den, or even of Imogen, though Iachimo, who described

her, was so good at words? A series of pictures—illustrations—as we have with Dickens' novels, and with Thackeray's, may leave an impression of a figure—though even then not often of feminine beauty. But in this work Thackeray has succeeded in imbuing us with a sense of the outside loveliness of Beatrix by the mere force of words. We are not only told it, but we feel that she was such a one as a man cannot fail to covet, even when his judgment goes against his choice.

Here the judgment goes altogether against the choice. The girl grows up before us from her early youth till her twenty-fifth or twenty-sixth year, and becomes—such as her mother described her—one whose headlong will, whose jealousy, and whose vanity nothing could restrain. She has none of those soft foibles, half allied to virtues, by which weak women fall away into misery or perhaps distraction. She does not want to love or to be loved. She does not care to be fondled. She has no longing for caresses. She wants to be admired—and to make use of the admiration she shall achieve for the material purposes of her life. She wishes to rise in the world; and her beauty is the sword with which she must open her oyster. As to her heart, it is a thing of which she becomes aware, only to assure herself that it must be laid aside and put out of the question. Now and again Esmond touches it. She just feels that she has a heart to be touched. But she never has a doubt as to her conduct in that respect. She will not allow her dreams of ambition to be disturbed by such folly as love.

In all that there might be something, if not good and great, nevertheless grand, if her ambition, though worldly, had in it a touch of nobility. But this poor creature is made with her bleared blind eyes to fall into the very

lowest depths of feminine ignobility. One lover comes after another. Harry Esmond is, of course, the lover with whom the reader interests himself. At last there comes a duke—fifty years old, indeed, but with semi-royal appanages. As his wife she will become a duchess, with many diamonds, and be Her Excellency. The man is stern, cold, and jealous; but she does not doubt for a moment. She is to be Duchess of Hamilton, and towers already in pride of place above her mother, and her kinsman lover, and all her belongings. The story here, with its little incidents of birth, and blood, and ignoble pride, and gratified ambition, with a dash of true feminine nobility on the part of the girl's mother, is such as to leave one with the impression that it has hardly been beaten in English prose fiction. Then, in the last moment, the duke is killed in a duel, and the news is brought to the girl by Esmond. She turns upon him and rebukes him harshly. Then she moves away, and feels in a moment that there is nothing left for her in this world, and that she can only throw herself upon devotion for consolation. "I am best in my own room and by myself," she said. Her eyes were quite dry, nor did Esmond ever see them otherwise, save once, in respect of that grief. She gave him a cold hand as she went out. "Thank you, brother," she said in a low voice, and with a simplicity more touching than tears; "all that you have said is true and kind, and I will go away and will ask pardon."

But the consolation coming from devotion did not go far with such a one as her. We cannot rest on religion merely by saying that we will do so. Very speedily there comes consolation in another form. Queen Anne is on her deathbed, and a young Stuart prince appears upon the scene, of whom some loyal hearts dream that they

can make a king. He is such as Stuarts were, and only walks across the novelist's canvas to show his folly and heartlessness. But there is a moment in which Beatrix thinks that she may rise in the world to the proud place of a royal mistress. That is her last ambition! That is her pride! That is to be her glory! The bleared eyes can see no clearer than that. But the mock prince passes away, and nothing but the disgrace of the wish remains.

Such is the story of *Esmond*, leaving with it, as does all Thackeray's work, a melancholy conviction of the vanity of all things human. *Vanitas vanitatum*, as he wrote on the pages of the French lady's album, and again in one of the earlier numbers of *The Cornhill Magazine*. With much that is picturesque, much that is droll, much that is valuable as being a correct picture of the period selected, the gist of the book is melancholy throughout. It ends with the promise of happiness to come, but that is contained merely in a concluding paragraph. The one woman, during the course of the story, becomes a widow, with a living love in which she has no hope, with children for whom her fears are almost stronger than her affection, who never can rally herself to happiness for a moment. The other, with all her beauty and all her brilliance, becomes what we have described—and marries at last her brother's tutor, who becomes a bishop by means of her intrigues. Esmond, the hero, who is compounded of all good gifts, after a childhood and youth tinged throughout with melancholy, vanishes from us, with the promise that he is to be rewarded by the hand of the mother of the girl he has loved.

And yet there is not a page in the book over which a thoughtful reader cannot pause with delight. The nature in it is true nature. Given a story thus sad, and persons



thus situated, and it is thus that the details would follow each other, and thus that the people would conduct themselves. It was the tone of Thackeray's mind to turn away from the prospect of things joyful, and to see—or believe that he saw—in all human affairs, the seed of something base, of something which would be antagonistic to true contentment. All his snobs, and all his fools, and all his knaves, come from the same conviction. Is it not the doctrine on which our religion is founded—though the sadness of it there is alleviated by the doubtful promise of a heaven?

Though thrice a thousand years are passed  
Since David's son, the sad and splendid,  
The weary king ecclesiast  
Upon his awful tablets penned it.

So it was that Thackeray preached his sermon. But melancholy though it be, the lesson taught in *Esmond* is salutary from beginning to end. The sermon truly preached is that glory can only come from that which is truly glorious, and that the results of meanness end always in the mean. No girl will be taught to wish to shine like Beatrix, nor will any youth be made to think that to gain the love of such a one it can be worth his while to expend his energy or his heart.

*Esmond* was published in 1852. It was not till 1858, some time after he had returned from his lecturing tours, that he published the sequel called *The Virginians*. It was first brought out in twenty-four monthly numbers, and ran through the years 1858 and 1859, Messrs. Bradbury and Evans having been the publishers. It takes up by no means the story of *Esmond*, and hardly the characters. The twin lads, who are called the Virginians, and

whose name is Warrington, are grandsons of Esmond and his wife Lady Castlewood. Their one daughter, born at the estate in Virginia, had married a Warrington, and the Virginians are the issue of that marriage. In the story, one is sent to England, there to make his way; and the other is for awhile supposed to have been killed by the Indians. How he was not killed, but after awhile comes again forward in the world of fiction, will be found in the story, which it is not our purpose to set forth here. The most interesting part of the narrative is that which tells us of the later fortunes of Madame Beatrix—the Baroness Bernstein—the lady who had in her youth been Beatrix Esmond, who had then condescended to become Mrs. Tusher, the tutor's wife, whence she rose to be the "lady" of a bishop, and, after the bishop had been put to rest under a load of marble, had become the baroness—a rich old woman, courted by all her relatives because of her wealth.

In *The Virginians*, as a work of art, is discovered, more strongly than had shown itself yet in any of his works, that propensity to wandering which came to Thackeray because of his idleness. It is, I think, to be found in every book he ever wrote—except *Esmond*; but is here more conspicuous than it had been in his earlier years. Though he can settle himself down to his pen and ink—not always even to that without a struggle, but to that with sufficient burst of energy to produce a large average amount of work—he cannot settle himself down to the task of contriving a story. There have been those—and they have not been bad judges of literature—who have told me that they have best liked these vague narratives. The mind of the man has been clearly exhibited in them. In them he has spoken out his thoughts, and

given the world to know his convictions, as well as could have been done in the carrying out any well-conducted plot. And though the narratives be vague, the characters are alive. In *The Virginians*, the two young men and their mother, and the other ladies with whom they have to deal, and especially their aunt, the Baroness Bernstein, are all alive. For desultory reading, for that picking up of a volume now and again which requires permission to forget the plot of a novel, this novel is admirably adapted. There is not a page of it vacant or dull. But he who takes it up to read as a whole, will find that it is the work of a desultory writer, to whom it is not unfrequently difficult to remember the incidents of his own narrative. "How good it is, even as it is!—but if he would have done his best for us, what might he not have done!" This, I think, is what we feel when we read *The Virginians*. The author's mind has in one way been active enough—and powerful, as it always is; but he has been unable to fix it to an intended purpose, and has gone on from day to day furthering the difficulty he has intended to master, till the book, under the stress of circumstances—demands for copy and the like—has been completed before the difficulty has even in truth been encountered.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THACKERAY'S BURLESQUES.

As so much of Thackeray's writing partakes of the nature of burlesque, it would have been unnecessary to devote a separate chapter to the subject, were it not that there are among his tales two or three so exceedingly good of their kind, coming so entirely up to our idea of what a prose burlesque should be, that were I to omit to mention them I should pass over a distinctive portion of our author's work.

The volume called *Burlesques*, published in 1869, begins with the *Novels by Eminent Hands*, and *Jeames's Diary*, to which I have already alluded. It contains also *The Tremendous Adventures of Major Gahagan*, *A Legend of the Rhine*, and *Rebecca and Rowena*. It is of these that I will now speak. *The History of the Next French Revolution* and *Cox's Diary*, with which the volume is concluded, are, according to my thinking, hardly equal to the others; nor are they so properly called burlesques.

Nor will I say much of Major Gahagan, though his adventures are very good fun. He is a warrior—that is, of course—and he is one in whose wonderful narrative all that distant India can produce in the way of boasting, is superadded to Ireland's best efforts in the same line. Baron Munchausen was nothing to him; and to the bare

and simple miracles of the baron is joined that humour without which Thackeray never tells any story. This is broad enough, no doubt, but is still humour—as when the major tells us that he always kept in his own apartment a small store of gunpowder; “always keeping it under my bed, with a candle burning for fear of accidents.” Or when he describes his courage; “I was running—running as the brave stag before the hounds—running, as I have done a great number of times in my life, when there was no help for it but a run.” Then he tells us of his digestion. “Once in Spain I ate the leg of a horse, and was so eager to swallow this morsel, that I bolted the shoe as well as the hoof, and never felt the slightest inconvenience from either.” He storms a citadel, and has only a snuff-box given him for his reward. “Never mind,” says Major Gahagan; “when they want me to storm a fort again, I shall know better.” By which we perceive that the major remembered his Horace, and had in his mind the soldier who had lost his purse. But the major’s adventures, excellent as they are, lack the continued interest which is attached to the two following stories.

Of what nature is *The Legend of the Rhine*, we learn from the commencement. “It was in the good old days of chivalry, when every mountain that bathes its shadow in the Rhine had its castle; not inhabited as now by a few rats and owls, nor covered with moss and wallflowers and funguses and creeping ivy. No, no; where the ivy now clusters there grew strong portcullis and bars of steel; where the wallflowers now quiver in the ramparts there were silken banners embroidered with wonderful heraldry; men-at-arms marched where now you shall only see a bank of moss or a hideous black champignon; and in place of the rats and owlets, I warrant me there were ladies and

knights to revel in the great halls, and to feast and dance, and to make love there." So that we know well beforehand of what kind will this story be. It will be pure romance—burlesqued. "Ho seneschal, fill me a cup of hot liquor; put sugar in it, good fellow; yea, and a little hot water—but very little, for my soul is sad as I think of those days and knights of old."

A knight is riding alone on his war-horse, with all his armour with him—and his luggage. His rank is shown by the name on his portmanteau, and his former address and present destination by a card which was attached. It had run, "Count Ludwig de Hombourg, Jerusalem, but the name of the Holy City had been dashed out with the pen, and that of Godesberg substituted." "By St. Hugo of Katzenellenbogen," said the good knight, shivering, "'tis colder here than at Damascus. Shall I be at Godesberg in time for dinner?" He has come to see his friend Count Karl, Margrave of Godesberg.

But at Godesberg everything is in distress and sorrow. There is a new inmate there, one Sir Gottfried, since whose arrival the knight of the castle has become a wretched man, having been taught to believe all evils of his wife, and of his child Otto, and a certain stranger, one Hildebrandt. Gottfried, we see with half an eye, has done it all. It is in vain that Ludwig de Hombourg tells his old friend Karl that this Gottfried is a thoroughly bad fellow, that he had been found to be a card-sharper in the Holy Land, and had been drummed out of his regiment. "'Twas but some silly quarrel over the wine-cup," says Karl. "Hugo de Brodenel would have no black bottle on the board." We think we can remember the quarrel of "Brodenel" and the black bottle, though so many things have taken place since that.

There is a festival in the castle, and Hildebrandt comes with the other guests. Then Ludwig's attention is called by poor Karl, the father, to a certain family likeness. Can it be that he is not the father of his own child? He is playing cards with his friend Ludwig when that traitor Gottfried comes and whispers to him, and makes an appointment. "I will be there too," thought Count Ludwig, the good Knight of Hombourg.

On the next morning, before the stranger knight had shaken off his slumbers, all had been found out and everything done. The lady had been sent to a convent and her son to a monastery. The knight of the castle has no comfort but in his friend Gottfried, a distant cousin who is to inherit everything. All this is told to Sir Ludwig—who immediately takes steps to repair the mischief. "A cup of coffee straight," says he to the servitors. "Bid the cook pack me a sausage and bread in paper, and the groom saddle Streithengst. We have far to ride." So this redresser of wrongs starts off, leaving the Margrave in his grief.

Then there is a great fight between Sir Ludwig and Sir Gottfried, admirably told in the manner of the later chroniclers—a hermit sitting by and describing everything almost as well as Rebecca did on the tower. Sir Ludwig being in the right, of course gains the day. But the escape of the fallen knight's horse is the cream of this chapter. "Away, ay, away!—away amid the green vineyards and golden cornfields; away up the steep mountains, where he frightened the eagles in their eyries; away down the clattering ravines, where the flashing cataracts tumble; away through the dark pine-forests, where the hungry wolves are howling; away over the dreary wolds, where the wild wind walks alone; away through the splashing

quagmires, where the will-o'-the-wisp slunk frightened among the reeds; away through light and darkness, storm and sunshine; away by tower and town, highroad and hamlet. . . . Brave horse! gallant steed! snorting child of Aïaby! On went the horse, over mountains, rivers, turn-pikes, applewomen; and never stopped until he reached a livery-stable in Cologne, where his master was accustomed to put him up!"

The conquered knight, Sir Gottfried, of course reveals the truth. This Hildebrandt is no more than the lady's brother—as it happened a brother in disguise—and hence the likeness. Wicked knights, when they die, always divulge their wicked secrets, and this knight Gottfried does so now. Sir Ludwig carries the news home to the afflicted husband and father; who of course instantly sends off messengers for his wife and son. The wife won't come. All she wants is to have her dresses and jewels sent to her. Of so cruel a husband she has had enough. As for the son, he has jumped out of a boat on the Rhine, as he was being carried to his monastery, and was drowned!

But he was not drowned, but had only dived. "The gallant boy swam on beneath the water, never lifting his head for a single moment between Godesberg and Cologne; the distance being twenty-five or thirty miles."

Then he becomes an archer, dressed in green from head to foot. How it was is all told in the story; and he goes to shoot for a prize at the Castle of Adolf the Duke of Cleves. On his way he shoots a raven marvellously—almost as marvellously as did Robin Hood the twig in Ivanhoe. Then one of his companions is married, or nearly married, to the mysterious "Lady of Windeck"—would have been married but for Otto, and that the bishop and dean, who were dragged up from their long-ago graves to



perform the ghostly ceremony, were prevented by the ill-timed mirth of a certain old canon of the church named Schidnischmidt. The reader has to read the name out loud before he recognizes an old friend. But this of the Lady of Windeck is an episode.

How at the shooting-match, which of course ensued, Otto shot for and won the heart of a fair lady, the duke's daughter, need not be told here, nor how he quarrelled with the Rowski of Donnerblitz—the hideous and sulky, but rich and powerful, nobleman who had come to take the hand, whether he could win the heart or not, of the daughter of the duke. It is all arranged according to the proper and romantic order. Otto, though he enlists in the duke's archer-guard as simple soldier, contrives to fight with the Rowski de Donnerblitz, Margrave of Eulenschrenkenstein, and of course kills him. "Yield, yield, Sir Rowski!" shouted he, in a calm voice. A blow dealt madly at his head was the reply. It was the last blow that the Count of Eulenschrenkenstein ever struck in battle. The curse was on his lips as the crashing steel descended into his brain and split it in two. He rolled like a dog from his horse, his enemy's knee was in a moment on his chest, and the dagger of mercy at his throat, as the knight once more called upon him to yield." The knight was of course the archer who had come forward as an unknown champion, and had touched the Rowski's shield with the point of his lance. For this story, as well as the rest, is a burlesque on our dear old favourite Ivanhoe.

That everything goes right at last, that the wife comes back from her monastery, and joins her jealous husband, and that the duke's daughter has always, in truth, known that the poor archer was a noble knight—these things are all matters of course.

But the best of the three burlesques is *Rebecca and Rowena, or A Romance upon Romance*, which I need not tell my readers is a continuation of *Ivanhoe*. Of this burlesque it is the peculiar characteristic that, while it has been written to ridicule the persons and the incidents of that perhaps the most favourite novel in the English language, it has been so written that it would not have offended the author had he lived to read it, nor does it disgust or annoy those who most love the original. There is not a word in it having an intention to belittle Scott. It has sprung from the genuine humour created in Thackeray's mind by his aspect of the romantic. We remember how reticent, how dignified was Rowena—how cold we perhaps thought her, whether there was so little of that billing and cooing, that kissing and squeezing, between her and Ivanhoe which we used to think necessary to lovers' blisses. And there was left, too, on our minds an idea that Ivanhoe had liked the Jewess almost as well as Rowena, and that Rowena might possibly have become jealous. Thackeray's mind at once went to work and pictured to him a Rowena such as such a woman might become after marriage; and as Ivanhoe was of a melancholy nature and apt to be hipped, and grave, and silent, as a matter of course Thackeray presumes him to have been henpecked after his marriage.

Our dear Wamba disturbs his mistress in some devotional conversation with her chaplain, and the stern lady orders that the fool shall have three-dozen lashes. "I got you out of Front de Bœuf's castle," said poor Wamba, piteously appealing to Sir Wilfrid of Ivanhoe, "and canst thou not save me from the lash?"

"Yes; from Front de Bœuf's castle, *when you were locked up with the Jewess in the tower!*" said Rowena, haughtily replying to the timid appeal of her husband.

“Gurth, give him four-dozen” — and this was all poor Wamba got by applying for the mediation of his master. Then the satirist moralises: “Did you ever know a right-minded woman pardon another for being handsomer and more love-worthy than herself?” Rowena is “always flinging Rebecca into Ivanhoe’s teeth;” and altogether life at Rotherwood, as described by the later chronicles, is not very happy even when most domestic. Ivanhoe becomes sad and moody. He takes to drinking, and his lady does not forget to tell him of it. “Ah, dear axe!” he exclaims, apostrophising his weapon, “ah, gentle steel! that was a merry time when I sent thee crashing into the pate of the Emir Abdul Melek!” There was nothing left to him but his memories; and “in a word, his life was intolerable.” So he determines that he will go and look after King Richard, who of course was wandering abroad. He anticipates a little difficulty with his wife; but she is only too happy to let him go, comforting herself with the idea that Athelstane will look after her. So her husband starts on his journey. “Then Ivanhoe’s trumpet blew. Then Rowena waved her pocket-handkerchief. Then the household gave a shout. Then the pursuivant of the good knight, Sir Wilfrid the Crusader, flung out his banner — which was argent, a gules cramoisy with three Moors impaled — then Wamba gave a lash on his mule’s haunch, and Ivanhoe, heaving a great sigh, turned the tail of his war-horse upon the castle of his fathers.”

Ivanhoe finds Cœur de Leon besieging the Castle of Chalons, and there they both do wondrous deeds, Ivanhoe always surpassing the king. The jealousy of the courtiers, the ingratitude of the king, and the melancholy of the knight, who is never comforted except when he has slaughtered some hundreds, are delightful. Roger de Backbite

and Peter de Toadhole are intended to be quite real. Then his majesty sings, passing off as his own a song of Charles Lever's. Sir Wilfrid declares the truth, and twits the king with his falsehood, whereupon he has the guitar thrown at his head for his pains. He catches the guitar, however, gracefully in his left hand, and sings his own immortal ballad of *King Canute*—than which Thackeray never did anything better.

“Might I stay the sun above us, good Sir Bishop?” Canute cried;  
“Could I bid the silver moon to pause upon her heavenly ride?  
If the moon obeys my orders, sure I can command the tide.

Will the advancing waves obey me, Bishop, if I make the sign?”  
Said the bishop, bowing lowly: “Land and sea, my lord, are thine.”  
Canute turned towards the ocean: “Back,” he said, “thou foaming  
brine.”

But the sullen ocean answered with a louder, deeper roar,  
And the rapid waves drew nearer, falling, sounding on the shore;  
Back the keeper and the bishop, back the king and courtiers bore.

We must go to the book to look at the picture of the king as he is killing the youngest of the sons of the Count of Chalons. Those illustrations of Doyle's are admirable. The size of the king's head, and the size of his battle-axe as contrasted with the size of the child, are burlesque all over. But the king has been wounded by a bolt from the bow of Sir Bertrand de Gourdon while he is slaughtering the infant, and there is an end of him. Ivanhoe, too, is killed at the siege—Sir Roger de Backbite having stabbed him in the back during the scene. Had he not been then killed, his widow Rowena could not have married Athelstane, which she soon did after hearing the sad news; nor could he have had that celebrated epitaph in Latin and English:

Hic est Guilfridus, belli dum vixit avidus.  
 Cum gladeo et lancea Normannia et quoque Francia  
 Verbera dura dabat. Per Turcos multum equitabat.  
 Guilbertum occidit;—atque Hyerosolyma vidit.  
 Heu! nunc sub fossa sunt tanti militis ossa.  
 Uxor Athelstani est conjux castissima Thani.<sup>1</sup>

The translation, we are told, was by Wamba :

Under the stone you behold,	Brian, the Templar untrue,
Buried and coffined and cold,	Fairly in tourney he slew ;
Lieth Sir Wilfrid the Bold.	Saw Hierusalem too.

Always he marched in advance,	Now he is buried and gone,
Warring in Flanders and France,	Lying beneath the gray stone.
Doughty with sword and with lance.	Where shall you find such a one?

Famous in Saracen fight,	Long time his widow deplored,
Rode in his youth, the Good Knight,	Weeping, the fate of her lord,
Scattering Paynims in flight.	Sadly cut off by the sword.

When she was eased of her pain,  
 Came the good lord Athelstane,  
 When her ladyship married again.

The next chapter begins naturally as follows: "I trust nobody will suppose, from the events described in the last chapter, that our friend Ivanhoe is really dead." He is of course cured of his wounds, though they take six years in the curing. And then he makes his way back to Rotherwood, in a friar's disguise, much as he did on that former

<sup>1</sup> I doubt that Thackeray did not write the Latin epitaph, but I hardly dare suggest the name of any author. The "vixit avidus" is quite worthy of Thackeray; but had he tried his hand at such mode of expression he would have done more of it. I should like to know whether he had been in company with Father Prout at the time.

occasion when we first met him, and there is received by Athelstane and Rowena—and their boy!—while Wamba sings him a song:

Then you know the worth of a lass,  
Once you have come to forty year!

No one, of course, but Wamba knows Ivanhoe, who roams about the country, melancholy—as he of course would be—charitable—as he perhaps might be—for we are specially told that he had a large fortune and nothing to do with it, and slaying robbers wherever he met them—but sad at heart all the time. Then there comes a little burst of the author's own feelings, while he is burlesquing. "Ah my dear friends and British public, are there not others who are melancholy under a mask of gaiety, and who in the midst of crowds are lonely? Liston was a most melancholy man; Grimaldi had feelings; and then others I wot of. But psha!—let us have the next chapter." In all of which there was a touch of earnestness.

Ivanhoe's griefs were enhanced by the wickedness of King John, under whom he would not serve. "It was Sir Wilfrid of Ivanhoe, I need scarcely say, who got the Barons of England to league together and extort from the king that famous instrument and palladium of our liberties, at present in the British Museum, Great Russell Street, Bloomsbury—The Magna Charta." Athelstane also quarrels with the king, whose orders he disobeys, and Rotherwood is attacked by the royal army. No one was of real service in the way of fighting except Ivanhoe—and how could he take up that cause? "No; be hanged to me," said the knight, bitterly. "This is a quarrel in which I can't interfere. Common politeness forbids. Let yonder ale-swilling Athelstane defend his—ha, ha!—*wife*; and

my Lady Rowena guard her—ha, ha!—*son!*” and he laughed wildly and madly.

But Athelstane is killed—this time in earnest—and then Ivanhoe rushes to the rescue. He finds Gurth dead at the park-lodge; and though he is all alone—having out ridden his followers—he rushes up the chestnut avenue to the house, which is being attacked. “An Ivanhoe! an Ivanhoe!” he bellowed out with a shout that overcame all the din of battle;—“*Notre Dame à la recousse!*” and to hurl his lance through the midriff of Reginald de Bracy, who was commanding the assault—who fell howling with anguish—to wave his battle-axe over his own head, and to cut off those of thirteen men-at-arms, was the work of an instant. “An Ivanhoe! an Ivanhoe!” he still shouted, and down went a man as sure as he said “hoe!”

Nevertheless he is again killed by multitudes, or very nearly—and has again to be cured by the tender nursing of Wamba. But Athelstane is really dead, and Rowena and the boy have to be found. He does his duty and finds them—just in time to be present at Rowena's death. She has been put in prison by King John, and is in extremis when her first husband gets to her. “Wilfrid, my early loved,” slowly gasped she, removing her gray hair from her furrowed temples, and gazing on her boy fondly as he nestled on Ivanhoe's knee—“promise me by St. Waltheof of Templestowe—promise me one boon!”

“I do,” said Ivanhoe, clasping the boy, and thinking that it was to that little innocent that the promise was intended to apply.

<sup>1</sup> There is something almost illnatured in his treatment of Rowena, who is very false in her declarations of love;—and it is to be feared that by Rowena the author intends the normal married lady of English society.

“By St. Waltheof?”

“By St. Waltheof!”

“Promise me, then,” gasped Rowena, staring wildly at him, “that you will never marry a Jewess!”

“By St. Waltheof!” cried Ivanhoe, “but this is too much,” and he did not make the promise.

“Having placed young Cedric at school at the Hall of Dotheboys, in Yorkshire, and arranged his family affairs, Sir Wilfrid of Ivanhoe quitted a country which had no longer any charm for him, as there was no fighting to be done, and in which his stay was rendered less agreeable by the notion that King John would hang him.” So he goes forth and fights again, in league with the Knights of St. John—the Templars naturally having a dislike to him because of Brian de Bois Guilbert. “The only fault that the great and gallant, though severe and ascetic Folko of Heydenbraten, the chief of the Order of St. John, found with the melancholy warrior whose lance did such service to the cause, was that he did not persecute the Jews as so religious a knight should. So the Jews, in cursing the Christians, always excepted the name of the Desdichado—or the double disinherited, as he now was—the Desdichado Doblado.” Then came the battle of Alarcos, and the Moors were all but in possession of the whole of Spain. Sir Wilfrid, like other good Christians, cannot endure this, so he takes ship in Bohemia, where he happens to be quartered, and has himself carried to Barcelona, and proceeds “to slaughter the Moors forthwith.” Then there is a scene in which Isaac of York comes on as a messenger, to ransom from a Spanish knight, Don Beltram de Cuchilla y Trabuco, y Espada, y Espelon, a little Moorish girl. The Spanish knight of course murders the little girl instead of taking the ransom. Two hundred thousand



dirhems are offered, however much that may be; but the knight, who happens to be in funds at the time, prefers to kill the little girl. All this is only necessary to the story as introducing Isaac of York. Sir Wilfrid is of course intent upon finding Rebecca. Through all his troubles and triumphs, from his gaining and his losing of Rowena, from the day on which he had been "*locked up with the Jewess in the tower,*" he had always been true to her. "Away from me!" said the old Jew, tottering. "Away, Rebecca is—dead!" Then Ivanhoe goes out and kills fifty thousand Moors, and there is the picture of him—killing them.

But Rebecca is not dead at all. Her father had said so because Rebecca had behaved very badly to him. She had refused to marry the Moorish prince, or any of her own people, the Jews, and had gone as far as to declare her passion for Ivanhoe and her resolution to be a Christian. All the Jews and Jewesses in Valencia turned against her—so that she was locked up in the back-kitchen and almost starved to death. But Ivanhoe found her, of course, and makes her Mrs. Ivanhoe, or Lady Wilfrid the second. Then Thackeray tells us how for many years he, Thackeray, had not ceased to feel that it ought to be so. "Indeed I have thought of it any time these five-and-twenty years—ever since, as a boy at school, I commenced the noble study of novels—ever since the day when, lying on sunny slopes, of half-holidays, the fair chivalrous figures and beautiful shapes of knights and ladies were visible to me, ever since I grew to love Rebecca, that sweetest creature of the poet's fancy, and longed to see her righted."

And so, no doubt, it had been. The very burlesque had grown from the way in which his young imagination had been moved by Scott's romance. He had felt, from

the time of those happy half-holidays in which he had been lucky enough to get hold of the novel, that according to all laws of poetic justice, Rebecca, as being the more beautiful and the more interesting of the heroines, was entitled to the possession of the hero. We have all of us felt the same. But to him had been present at the same time all that is ludicrous in our ideas of middle-age chivalry; the absurdity of its recorded deeds, the blood-thirstiness of its recreations, the selfishness of its men, the falseness of its honour, the cringing of its loyalty, the tyranny of its princes. And so there came forth Rebecca and Rowena, all broad fun from beginning to end, but never without a purpose—the best burlesque, as I think, in our language.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THACKERAY'S LECTURES.

In speaking of Thackeray's life, I have said why and how it was that he took upon himself to lecture, and have also told the reader that he was altogether successful in carrying out the views proposed to himself. Of his peculiar manner of lecturing I have said but little, never having heard him. "He pounded along—very clearly," I have been told; from which I surmise that there was no special grace of eloquence, but that he was always audible. I cannot imagine that he should have been ever eloquent. He could not have taken the trouble necessary with his voice, with his cadences, or with his outward appearance. I imagine that they who seem so naturally to fall into the proprieties of elocution have generally taken a great deal of trouble beyond that which the mere finding of their words has cost them. It is clearly to the matter of what he then gave the world, and not to the manner, that we must look for what interest is to be found in the lectures.

Those on *The English Humorists* were given first. The second set was on *The Four Georges*. In the volume now before us *The Georges* are printed first, and the whole is produced simply as a part of Thackeray's literary work. Looked at, however, in that light, the merit of the two sets of biographical essays is very different. In the

one we have all the anecdotes which could be brought together respecting four of our kings—who as men were not peculiar, though their reigns were, and will always be, famous, because the country during the period was increasing greatly in prosperity, and was ever strengthening the hold it had upon its liberties. In the other set the lecturer was a man of letters dealing with men of letters, and himself a prince among humorists is dealing with the humorists of his own country and language. One could not imagine a better subject for such discourses from Thackeray's mouth than the latter. The former was not, I think, so good.

In discussing the lives of kings the biographer may trust to personal details or to historical facts. He may take the man, and say what good or evil may be said of him as a man;—or he may take the period, and tell his readers what happened to the country while this or the other king was on the throne. In the case with which we are dealing, the lecturer had not time enough or room enough for real history. His object was to let his audience know of what nature were the men; and we are bound to say that the pictures have not, on the whole, been flattering. It was almost necessary that with such a subject such should be the result. A story of family virtues, with princes and princesses well brought up, with happy family relations, all *couleur de rose*—as it would of course become us to write if we were dealing with the life of a living sovereign—would not be interesting. No one on going to hear Thackeray lecture on the Georges expected that. There must be some piquancy given, or the lecture would be dull;—and the eulogy of personal virtues can seldom be piquant. It is difficult to speak fittingly of a sovereign, either living or not, long since gone. You can

hardly praise such a one without flattery. You can hardly censure him without injustice. We are either ignorant of his personal doings or we know them as secrets, which have been divulged for the most part either falsely or treacherously—often both falsely and treacherously. It is better, perhaps, that we should not deal with the personalities of princes.

I believe that Thackeray fancied that he had spoken well of George III., and am sure that it was his intention to do so. But the impression he leaves is poor. "He is said not to have cared for Shakespeare or tragedy much; farces and pantomimes were his joy;—and especially when clown swallowed a carrot or a string of sausages, he would laugh so outrageously that the lovely princess by his side would have to say, 'My gracious monarch, do compose yourself.' 'George, be a king!' were the words which she"—his mother—"was ever croaking in the ears of her son; and a king the simple, stubborn, affectionate, bigoted man tried to be." "He did his best; he worked according to his lights; what virtues he knew he tried to practise; what knowledge he could master he strove to acquire." If the lectures were to be popular, it was absolutely necessary that they should be written in this strain. A lecture simply laudatory on the life of St. Paul would not draw even the bench of bishops to listen to it; but were a flaw found in the apostle's life, the whole Church of England would be bound to know all about it. I am quite sure that Thackeray believed every word that he said in the lectures, and that he intended to put in the good and the bad, honestly, as they might come to his hand. We may be quite sure that he did not intend to flatter the royal family;—equally sure that he would not calumniate. There were, however, so many difficulties to be encounter-

ed that I cannot but think that the subject was ill-chosen. In making them so amusing as he did, and so little offensive, great ingenuity was shown.

I will now go back to the first series, in which the lecturer treated of Swift, Congreve, Addison, Steele, Prior, Gay, Pope, Hogarth, Smollett, Fielding, Sterne, and Goldsmith. All these Thackeray has put in their proper order, placing the men from the date of their birth, except Prior, who was in truth the eldest of the lot, but whom it was necessary to depose, in order that the great Swift might stand first on the list, and Smollett, who was not born till fourteen years after Fielding, eight years after Sterne, and who has been moved up, I presume, simply from caprice. From the birth of the first to the death of the last, was a period of nearly a hundred years. They were never absolutely all alive together; but it was nearly so, Addison and Prior having died before Smollett was born. Whether we should accept as humorists the full catalogue, may be a question; though we shall hardly wish to eliminate any one from such a dozen of names. Pope we should hardly define as a humorist, were we to be seeking for a definition specially fit for him, though we shall certainly not deny the gift of humour to the author of *The Rape of the Lock*, or to the translator of any portion of *The Odyssey*. Nor should we have included Fielding or Smollett, in spite of Parson Adams and Tabitha Bramble, unless anxious to fill a good company. That Hogarth was specially a humorist no one will deny; but in speaking of humorists we should have presumed, unless otherwise notified, that humorists in letters only had been intended. As Thackeray explains clearly what he means by a humorist, I may as well here repeat the passage: "If humour only meant laughter, you would scarcely feel more

interest about humorous writers than about the private life of poor Harlequin just mentioned, who possesses in common with these the power of making you laugh. But the men regarding whose lives and stories your kind presence here shows that you have curiosity and sympathy, appeal to a great number of our other faculties, besides our mere sense of ridicule. The humorous writer professes to awaken and direct your love, your pity, your kindness—your scorn for untruth, pretension, imposture—your tenderness for the weak, the poor, the oppressed, the unhappy. To the best of his means and ability he comments on all the ordinary actions and passions of life almost. He takes upon himself to be the week-day preacher, so to speak. Accordingly, as he finds, and speaks, and feels the truth best, we regard him, esteem him—sometimes love him. And as his business is to mark other people's lives and peculiarities, we moralise upon *his* life when he is gone—and yesterday's preacher becomes the text for to-day's sermon."

Having thus explained his purpose, Thackeray begins his task, and puts Swift in his front rank as a humorist. The picture given of this great man has very manifestly the look of truth, and if true, is terrible indeed. We do, in fact, know it to be true—even though it be admitted that there is still room left for a book to be written on the life of the fearful dean. Here was a man endued with an intellect pellucid as well as brilliant; who could not only conceive but see also—with some fine instincts too; whom fortune did not flout; whom circumstances fairly served; but who, from first to last, was miserable himself, who made others miserable, and who deserved misery. Our business, during the page or two which we can give to the subject, is not with Swift, but with Thackeray's

picture of Swift. It is painted with colours terribly strong and with shadows fearfully deep. "Would you like to have lived with him?" Thackeray asks. Then he says how pleasant it would have been to have passed some time with Fielding, Johnson, or Goldsmith. "I should like to have been Shakespeare's shoeblick," he says. "But Swift! If you had been his inferior in parts—and that, with a great respect for all persons present, I fear is only very likely—his equal in mere social station, he would have bullied, scorned, and insulted you. If, undeterred by his great reputation, you had met him like a man, he would have quailed before you and not had the pluck to reply—and gone home, and years after written a foul epigram upon you." There is a picture! "If you had been a lord with a blue riband, who flattered his vanity, or could help his ambition, he would have been the most delightful company in the world. . . . How he would have torn your enemies to pieces for you, and made fun of the Opposition! His servility was so boisterous that it looked like independence." He was a man whose mind was never fixed on high things, but was striving always after something which, little as it might be, and successful as he was, should always be out of his reach. It had been his misfortune to become a clergyman, because the way to church preferment seemed to be the readiest. He became, as we all know, a dean—but never a bishop, and was therefore wretched. Thackeray describes him as a clerical highwayman, seizing on all he could get. But "the great prize has not yet come. The coach with the mitre and crozier in it, which he intends to have for *his* share, has been delayed on the way from St. James's; and he waits and waits till nightfall, when his runners come and tell him that the coach has taken a different way and escaped him.



So he fires his pistol into the air with a curse, and rides away into his own country;”—or, in other words, takes a poor deanery in Ireland.

Thackeray explains very correctly, as I think, the nature of the weapons which the man used—namely, the words and style with which he wrote. “That Swift was born at No. 7, Hoey’s Court, Dublin, on November 30, 1667, is a certain fact, of which nobody will deny the sister-island the honour and glory; but it seems to me he was no more an Irishman than a man born of English parents at Calcutta is a Hindoo. Goldsmith was an Irishman, and always an Irishman; Steele was an Irishman, and always an Irishman; Swift’s heart was English and in England, his habits English, his logic eminently English; his statement is elaborately simple; he shuns tropes and metaphors, and uses his ideas and words with a wise thrift and economy, as he used his money;—with which he could be generous and splendid upon great occasions, but which he husbanded when there was no need to spend it. He never indulges in needless extravagance of rhetoric, lavish epithets, profuse imagery. He lays his opinions before you with a grave simplicity and a perfect neatness.” This is quite true of him, and the result is that though you may deny him sincerity, simplicity, humanity, or good taste, you can hardly find fault with his language.

Swift was a clergyman, and this is what Thackeray says of him in regard to his sacred profession. “I know of few things more conclusive as to the sincerity of Swift’s religion, than his advice to poor John Gay to turn clergyman, and look out for a seat on the Bench! Gay, the author of *The Beggar’s Opera*; Gay, the wildest of the wits about town! It was this man that Jonathan Swift advised to take orders, to mount in a cassock and bands—

just as he advised him to husband his shillings, and put his thousand pounds out to interest."

It was not that he was without religion—or without, rather, his religious beliefs and doubts, "for Swift," says Thackeray, "was a reverent, was a pious spirit. For Swift could love and could pray." Left to himself and to the natural thoughts of his mind, without those "orders" to which he had bound himself as a necessary part of his trade, he could have turned to his God with questionings which need not then have been heartbreaking. "It is my belief," says Thackeray, "that he suffered frightfully from the consciousness of his own scepticism, and that he had bent his pride so far down as to put his apostasy out to hire." I doubt whether any of Swift's works are very much read now, but perhaps Gulliver's travels are oftener in the hands of modern readers than any other. Of all the satires in our language, it is probably the most cynical, the most absolutely illnatured, and therefore the falsest. Let those who care to form an opinion of Swift's mind from the best known of his works, turn to Thackeray's account of Gulliver. I can imagine no greater proof of misery than to have been able to write such a book as that.

It is thus that the lecturer concludes his lecture about Swift: "He shrank away from all affections sooner or later. Stella and Vanessa both died near him, and away from him. He had not heart enough to see them die. He broke from his fastest friend, Sheridan. He slunk away from his fondest admirer, Pope. His laugh jars on one's ear after seven-score years. He was always alone—alone and gnashing in the darkness, except when Stella's sweet smile came and shone on him. When that went, silence and utter night closed over him. An immense genius, an awful downfall and ruin! So great a man he

seems to me, that thinking of him is like thinking of an empire falling. We have other great names to mention—none, I think, however, so great or so gloomy.” And so we pass on from Swift, feeling that though the man was certainly a humorist, we have had as yet but little to do with humour.

Congreve is the next who, however truly he may have been a humorist, is described here rather as a man of fashion. A man of fashion he certainly was, but is best known in our literature as a comedian—worshipping that Comic Muse to whom Thackeray hesitates to introduce his audience, because she is not only merry, but shameless also. Congreve's muse was about as bad as any muse that ever misbehaved herself—and I think, as little amusing. “Reading in these plays now,” says Thackeray, “is like shutting your ears and looking at people dancing. What does it mean?—the measures, the grimaces, the bowing, shuffling, and retreating, the cavaliers seul advancing upon those ladies—those ladies and men twirling round at the end in a mad galop, after which everybody bows and the quaint rite is celebrated?” It is always so with Congreve's plays, and Etherege's and Wycherley's. The world we meet there is not our world, and as we read the plays we have no sympathy with these unknown people. It was not that they lived so long ago. They are much nearer to us in time than the men and women who figured on the stage in the reign of James I. But their nature is farther from our nature. They sparkle, but never warm. They are witty, but leave no impression. I might almost go further, and say that they are wicked, but never allure. “When Voltaire came to visit the great Congreve,” says Thackeray, “the latter rather affected to despise his literary reputation; and in this, perhaps, the great Congreve

was not far wrong. A touch of Steele's tenderness is worth all his finery; a flash of Swift's lightning, a beam of Addison's pure sunshine, and his tawdry playhouse taper is invisible. But the ladies loved him, and he was undoubtedly a pretty fellow."

There is no doubt as to the true humour of Addison, who next comes up before us, but I think that he makes hardly so good a subject for a lecturer as the great gloomy man of intellect, or the frivolous man of pleasure. Thackeray tells us all that is to be said about him as a humorist in so few lines that I may almost insert them on this page: "But it is not for his reputation as the great author of *Cato* and *The Campaign*, or for his merits as Secretary of State, or for his rank and high distinction as Lady Warwick's husband, or for his eminence as an examiner of political questions on the Whig side, or a guardian of British liberties, that we admire Joseph Addison. It is as a Tattler of small talk and a Spectator of mankind that we cherish and love him, and owe as much pleasure to him as to any human being that ever wrote. He came in that artificial age, and began to speak with his noble natural voice. He came the gentle satirist, who hit no unfair blow; the kind judge, who castigated only in smiling. While Swift went about hanging and ruthless, a literary Jeffreys, in Addison's kind court only minor cases were tried;—only peccadilloes and small sins against society, only a dangerous libertinism in tuckers and hoops, or a nuisance in the abuse of beaux canes and snuffboxes." Steele set *The Tatler* a-going. "But with his friend's discovery of *The Tatler*, Addison's calling was found, and the most delightful Tattler in the world began to speak. He does not go very deep. Let gentlemen of a profound genius, critics accustomed to the plunge of the bathes, con

sole themselves by thinking that he couldn't go very deep. There is no trace of suffering in his writing. He was so good, so honest, so healthy, so cheerfully selfish—if I must use the word!"

Such was Addison as a humorist; and when the hearer shall have heard also—or the reader read—that this most charming Tattler also wrote *Cato*, became a Secretary of State, and married a countess, he will have learned all that Thackeray had to tell of him.

Steele was one who stood much less high in the world's esteem, and who left behind him a much smaller name—but was quite Addison's equal as a humorist and a wit. Addison, though he had the reputation of a toper, was respectability itself. Steele was almost always disreputable. He was brought from Ireland, placed at the Charter House, and then transferred to Oxford, where he became acquainted with Addison. Thackeray says that "Steele found Addison a stately college don at Oxford." The stateliness and the don's rank were attributable no doubt to the more sober character of the English lad, for, in fact, the two men were born in the same year, 1672. Steele, who during his life was affected by various different tastes, first turned himself to literature, but early in life was bitten by the hue of a red coat and became a trooper in the Horse Guards. To the end he vacillated in the same way. In that charming paper in *The Tatler*, in which he records his father's death, his mother's griefs, his own most solemn and tender emotions, he says he is interrupted by the arrival of a hamper of wine, 'the same as is to be sold at Garraway's next week;' upon the receipt of which he sends for three friends, and they fall to instantly, drinking two bottles apiece, with great benefit to themselves, and not separating till two o'clock in the morning."

He had two wives, whom he loved dearly and treated badly. He hired grand houses, and bought fine horses for which he could never pay. He was often religious, but more often drunk. As a man of letters, other men of letters who followed him, such as Thackeray, could not be very proud of him. But everybody loved him; and he seems to have been the inventor of that flying literature which, with many changes in form and manner, has done so much for the amusement and edification of readers ever since his time. He was always commencing, or carrying on—often editing—some one of the numerous periodicals which appeared during his time. Thackeray mentions seven: *The Tatler*, *The Spectator*, *The Guardian*, *The Englishman*, *The Lover*, *The Reader*, and *The Theatre*; that three of them are well known to this day—the three first named—and are to be found in all libraries, is proof that his life was not thrown away.

I almost question Prior's right to be in the list, unless, indeed, the mastery over well-turned conceits is to be included within the border of humour. But Thackeray had a strong liking for Prior, and in his own humorous way rebukes his audience for not being familiar with *The Town and Country Mouse*. He says that Prior's epigrams have the genuine sparkle, and compares Prior to Horace. "His song, his philosophy, his good sense, his happy, easy turns and melody, his loves and his epicureanism, bear a great resemblance to that most delightful and accomplished master." I cannot say that I agree with this. Prior is generally neat in his expression. Horace is happy—which is surely a great deal more.

All that is said of Gay, Pope, Hogarth, Smollett, and Fielding is worth reading, and may be of great value both to those who have not time to study the authors, and to

those who desire to have their own judgments somewhat guided, somewhat assisted. That they were all men of humour there can be no doubt. Whether either of them, except perhaps Gay, would have been specially ranked as a humorist among men of letters, may be a question.

Sterne was a humorist, and employed his pen in that line, if ever a writer did so, and so was Goldsmith. Of the excellence and largeness of the disposition of the one, and the meanness and littleness of the other, it is not necessary that I should here say much. But I will give a short passage from our author as to each. He has been quoting somewhat at length from Sterne, and thus he ends: "And with this pretty dance and chorus the volume artfully concludes. Even here one can't give the whole description. There is not a page in Sterne's writing but has something that were better away, a latent corruption—a hint as of an impure presence. Some of that dreary double entendre may be attributed to freer times and manners than ours—but not all. The foul satyr's eyes leer out of the leaves constantly. The last words the famous author wrote were bad and wicked. The last lines the poor stricken wretch penned were for pity and pardon." Now a line or two about Goldsmith, and I will then let my reader go to the volume and study the lectures for himself. "The poor fellow was never so friendless but that he could befriend some one; never so pinched and wretched but he could give of his crust, and speak his word of compassion. If he had but his flute left, he would give that, and make the children happy in the dreary London courts."

Of this, too, I will remind my readers—those who have bookshelves well-filled to adorn their houses—that Goldsmith stands in the front where all the young people see

the volumes. There are few among the young people who do not refresh their sense of humour occasionally from that shelf; Sterne is relegated to some distant and high corner. The less often that he is taken down the better. Thackeray makes some half excuse for him because of the greater freedom of the times. But "the times" were the same for the two. Both Sterne and Goldsmith wrote in the reign of George II.; both died in the reign of George III.



## CHAPTER VIII.

### THACKERAY'S BALLADS.

WE have a volume of Thackeray's poems, republished under the name of *Ballads*, which is, I think, to a great extent a misnomer. They are all readable, almost all good, full of humour, and with some fine touches of pathos, most happy in their versification, and, with a few exceptions, hitting well on the head the nail which he intended to hit. But they are not on that account ballads. Literally, a ballad is a song; but it has come to signify a short chronicle in verse, which may be political, or pathetic, or grotesque—or it may have all three characteristics or any two of them; but not on that account is any grotesque poem a ballad—nor, of course, any pathetic or any political poem. *Jacob Omnium's Hoss* may fairly be called a ballad, containing as it does a chronicle of a certain well-defined transaction; and the story of *King Canute* is a ballad—one of the best that has been produced in our language in modern years. But such pieces as those called *The End of the Play* and *Vanitas Vanitatum*, which are didactic as well as pathetic, are not ballads in the common sense; nor are such songs as *The Mahogany Tree*, or the little collection called *Love Songs made Easy*. The majority of the pieces are not ballads; but if they be good of the kind, we should be ungrateful to quarrel much with the name.

How very good most of them are, I did not know till I re-read them for the purpose of writing this chapter. There is a manifest falling off in some few—which has come from that source of literary failure which is now so common. If a man write a book or a poem because it is in him to write it—the motive power being altogether in himself, and coming from his desire to express himself—he will write it well, presuming him to be capable of the effort. But if he write his book or poem simply because a book or poem is required from him, let his capability be what it may, it is not unlikely that he will do it badly. Thackeray occasionally suffered from the weakness thus produced. A ballad from *Policeman X—Bow Street Ballads* they were first called—was required by *Punch*, and had to be forthcoming, whatever might be the poet's humour, by a certain time. *Jacob Omnium's Hoss* is excellent. His heart and feeling were all there, on behalf of his friend, and against that obsolete old court of justice. But we can tell well when he was looking through the police reports for a subject, and taking what chance might send him, without any special interest in the matter. *The Knight and the Lady of Bath*, and the *Damages Two Hundred Pounds*, as they were demanded at Guildford, taste as though they were written to order.

Here, in his verses as in his prose, the charm of Thackeray's work lies in the mingling of humour with pathos and indignation. There is hardly a piece that is not more or less funny, hardly a piece that is not satirical;—and in most of them, for those who will look a little below the surface, there is something that will touch them. Thackeray, though he rarely uttered a word, either with his pen or his mouth, in which there was not an intention to reach our sense of humour, never was only funny. When he

was most determined to make us laugh, he had always a further purpose; some pity was to be extracted from us on behalf of the sorrows of men, or some indignation at the evil done by them.

This is the beginning of that story as to the *Two Hundred Pounds*, for which, as a ballad, I do not care very much:

Special jurymen of England who admire your country's laws,  
And proclaim a British jury worthy of the nation's applause,  
Gaily compliment each other at the issue of a cause,  
Which was tried at Guildford 'sises, this day week as ever was.

Here he is indignant, not only in regard to some miscarriage of justice on that special occasion, but at the general unfitness of jurymen for the work confided to them. "Gaily compliment yourselves," he says, "on your beautiful constitution, from which come such beautiful results as those I am going to tell you!" When he reminded us that *Ivanhoe* had produced *Magna Charta*, there was a purpose of irony even there in regard to our vaunted freedom. With all your *Magna Charta* and your juries, what are you but snobs! There is nothing so often misguided as general indignation, and I think that in his judgment of outside things, in the measure which he usually took of them, Thackeray was very frequently misguided. A satirist by trade will learn to satirise everything, till the light of the sun and the moon's loveliness will become evil and mean to him. I think that he was mistaken in his views of things. But we have to do with him as a writer, not as a political economist or a politician. His indignation was all true, and the expression of it was often perfect. The lines in which he addresses that *Pallis Court*, at the end of *Jacob Omnium's Hoss*, are almost sublime.

O Pallis Court, you move	Come down from that tribewn,
My pity most profound.	Thou shameless and unjust ;
A most amusing sport	Thou swindle, picking pockets in
You thought it, I'll be bound,	The name of Truth august ;
To saddle hup a three-pound	Come down, thou hoary Blas-
debt,	phemy,
With two-and-twenty pound.	For die thou shalt and must.

Good sport it is to you	And go it, Jacob Homnium,
To grind the honest poor,	And ply your iron pen,
To pay their just or unjust debts	And rise up, Sir John Jervis,
With eight hundred per cent.,	And shut me up that den ;
for Lor ;	That sty for fattening lawyers
Make haste and get your costes in,	in,
They will not last much mor !	On the bones of honest men.

“Come down from that tribewn, thou shameless and unjust !” It is impossible not to feel that he felt this as he wrote it.

There is a branch of his poetry which he calls—or which at any rate is now called, *Lyra Hybernica*, for which no doubt *The Groves of Blarney* was his model. There have been many imitations since, of which perhaps Barham's ballad on the coronation was the best, “When to Westminster the Royal Spinster and the Duke of Leinster all in order did repair !” Thackeray, in some of his attempts, has been equally droll and equally graphic. That on *The Cristal Palace*—not that at Sydenham, but its forerunner, the palace of the Great Exhibition—is very good, as the following catalogue of its contents will show :

There's holy saints	There's fountains there
And window paints,	And crosses fair ;
By Maydiayval Pugin ;	There's water-gods with urns ;
Alhamborough Jones	There's organs three,
Did paint the tones	To play, d'ye see ?
Of yellow and gambouge in.	“God save the Queen,” by turns

There's statues bright  
Of marble white,  
Of silver, and of copper ;  
And some in zinc,  
And some, I think,  
That isn't over proper.

There's staym ingyens,  
That stands in lines,  
Enormous and amazing,  
That squeal and snort  
Like whales in sport,  
Or elephants a grazing.

There's carts and gigs,  
And pins for pigs,  
There's dibblers and there's  
harrows,

And ploughs like toys  
For little boys,  
And ilegant wheel-barrowz.

For thim genteels  
Who ride on wheels,  
There's plenty to indulge 'em ;  
There's droskys snug  
From Paytersbug,  
And vayhycles from Bulgium.

There's cabs on stands  
And shandthry danns ;  
There's waggons from New  
York here ;  
There's Lapland sleighs  
Have crossed the seas,  
And jaunting cyars from Cork  
here.

In writing this Thackeray was a little late with his copy for *Punch* ; not, we should say, altogether an uncommon accident to him. It should have been with the editor early on Saturday, if not before, but did not come till late on Saturday evening. The editor, who was among men the most good-natured, and I should think the most forbearing, either could not, or in this case would not, insert it in the next week's issue, and Thackeray, angry and disgusted, sent it to *The Times*. In *The Times* of next Monday it appeared—very much, I should think, to the delight of the readers of that august newspaper.

Mr. Molony's account of the ball given to the Nepaulese ambassadors by the Peninsular and Oriental Company, is so like Barham's coronation in the account it gives of the guests, that one would fancy it must be by the same hand.

The noble Chair<sup>1</sup> stud at the stair  
 And bade the dhrums to thump; and he  
 Did thus evince to that Black Prince  
 The welcome of his Company.<sup>2</sup>

O fair the girls and rich the curls,  
 And bright the oys you saw there was;  
 And fixed each oye you then could spoi  
 On General Jung Bahawther was!

This ginerall great then tuck his sate,  
 With all the other gineralls,  
 Bedad his troat, his belt, his coat,  
 All bleezed with precious minerals;  
 And as he there, with princely air,  
 Recloinin on his cushion was,  
 All round about his royal chair  
 The squeezein and the pushin was.

O Pat, such girls, such jukes and earls,  
 Such fashion and nobilitee!  
 Just think of Tim, and fancy him  
 Amidst the high gentilitee!  
 There was the Lord de L'Huys, and the Portygeese  
 Minister and his lady there,  
 And I recognised, with much surprise,  
 Our messmate, Bob O'Grady, there.

All these are very good fun—so good in humour and so good in expression, that it would be needless to criticise their peculiar dialect, were it not that Thackeray has made for himself a reputation by his writing of Irish. In this he has been so entirely successful that for many English readers he has established a new language which may not improperly be called Hybernico-Thackerayan. If comedy is to be got from peculiarities of dialect, as no doubt it is,

<sup>1</sup> Chair—*i. e.*, Chairman.

<sup>2</sup> *I. e.*, The P. and O. Company.

one form will do as well as another, so long as those who read it know no better. So it has been with Thackeray's Irish, for in truth he was not familiar with the modes of pronunciation which make up Irish brogue. Therefore, though he is always droll, he is not true to nature. Many an Irishman coming to London, not unnaturally tries to imitate the talk of Londoners. You or I, reader, were we from the West, and were the dear County Galway to send either of us to Parliament, would probably endeavour to drop the dear brogue of our country, and in doing so we should make some mistakes. It was these mistakes which Thackeray took for the natural Irish tone. He was amused to hear a major called "Meejor," but was unaware that the sound arose from Pat's affection of English softness of speech. The expression natural to the unadulterated Irishman would rather be "Ma-ajor." He discovers his own provincialism, and trying to be polite and urbane, he says "Meejor." In one of the lines I have quoted there occurs the word "troat." Such a sound never came naturally from the mouth of an Irishman. He puts in an h instead of omitting it, and says "dhrink." He comes to London, and finding out that he is wrong with his "dhrink," he leaves out all the h's he can, and thus comes to "troat." It is this which Thackeray has heard. There is a little piece called the *Last Irish Grievance*, to which Thackeray adds a still later grievance, by the false sounds which he elicits from the calumniated mouth of the pretended Irish poet. Slaves are "sleeves," places are "pleeces," Lord John is "Lard Jahn," fatal is "fetal," danger is "deenger," and native is "neetive." All these are unintended slanders. Tea, Hibernicé, is "tay," please is "plaise," sea is "say," and ease is "aise." The softer sound of e is broadened out by the natural Irishman—not,

to my ear, without a certain euphony; but no one in Ireland says or hears the reverse. The Irishman who in London might talk of his "neetive" race, would be mincing his words to please the ear of the cockney.

*The Chronicle of the Drum* would be a true ballad all through, were it not that there is tacked on to it a long moral in an altered metre. I do not much value the moral, but the ballad is excellent, not only in much of its versification and in the turns of its language, but in the quaint and true picture it gives of the French nation. The drummer, either by himself or by some of his family, has drummed through a century of French battling, caring much for his country and its glory, but understanding nothing of the causes for which he is enthusiastic. Whether for King, Republic, or Emperor, whether fighting and conquering or fighting and conquered, he is happy as long as he can beat his drum on a field of glory. But throughout his adventures there is a touch of chivalry about our drummer. In all the episodes of his country's career he feels much of patriotism and something of tenderness. It is thus he sings during the days of the Revolution:

We had taken the head of King Capet,  
 We called for the blood of his wife;  
 Undaunted she came to the scaffold,  
 And bared her fair neck to the knife.  
 As she felt the foul fingers that touched her,  
 She shrank, but she deigned not to speak;  
 She looked with a royal disdain,  
 And died with a blush on her cheek!

'Twas thus that our country was saved!  
 So told us the Safety Committee!  
 But, psha, I've the heart of a soldier—  
 All gentleness, mercy, and pity.



I loathed to assist at such deeds,  
 And my drum beat its loudest of tunes,  
 As we offered to justice offended,  
 The blood of the bloody tribunes.

Away with such foul recollections!  
 No more of the axe and the block.  
 I saw the last fight of the sections,  
 As they fell 'neath our guns at St. Rock.  
 Young Bonaparte led us that day.

And so it goes on. I will not continue the stanza, because it contains the worst rhyme that Thackeray ever permitted himself to use. *The Chronicle of the Drum* has not the finish which he achieved afterwards, but it is full of national feeling, and carries on its purpose to the end with an admirable persistency:

A curse on those British assassins  
 Who ordered the slaughter of Ney;  
 A curse on Sir Hudson who tortured  
 The life of our hero away.  
 A curse on all Russians—I hate them;  
 On all Prussian and Austrian fry;  
 And, oh, but I pray we may meet them  
 And fight them again ere I die.

*The White Squall*—which I can hardly call a ballad, unless any description of a scene in verse may be included in the name—is surely one of the most graphic descriptions ever put into verse. Nothing written by Thackeray shows more plainly his power over words and rhymes. He draws his picture without a line omitted or a line too much, saying with apparent facility all that he has to say, and so saying it that every word conveys its natural meaning.

When a squall, upon a sudden,  
 Came o'er the waters scudding;

And the clouds began to gather,  
And the sea was lashed to lather,  
And the lowering thunder grumbled,  
And the lightning jumped and tumbled,  
And the ship and all the ocean  
Woke up in wild commotion.  
Then the wind set up a howling,  
And the poodle-dog a yowling,  
And the cocks began a crowing,  
And the old cow raised a lowing,  
As she heard the tempest blowing ;  
And fowls and geese did cackle,  
And the cordage and the tackle  
Began to shriek and crackle ;  
And the spray dashed o'er the funnels,  
And down the deck in runnels ;  
And the rushing water soaks all,  
From the seamen in the fo'ksal  
To the stokers whose black faces  
Peer out of their bed-places ;  
And the captain, he was bawling,  
And the sailors pulling, hauling,  
And the quarter-deck tarpauling  
Was shivered in the squalling ;  
And the passengers awaken,  
Most pitifully shaken ;  
And the steward jumps up and hastens  
For the necessary basins.

Then the Greeks they groaned and quivered,  
And they knelt, and moaned, and shivered,  
As the plunging waters met them,  
And splashed and overset them ;  
And they call in their emergence  
Upon countless saints and virgins ;  
And their marrowbones are bended,  
And they think the world is ended.  
And the Turkish women for'ard  
Were frightened and behorr'd ;

And shrieking and bewildering,  
 The mothers clutched their children ;  
 The men sang "Allah ! Illah !  
 Mashallah Bis-millah !"  
 As the warning waters doused them,  
 And splashed them and soused them ;  
 And they called upon the Prophet,  
 And thought but little of it.

Then all the fleas in Jewry  
 Jumped up and bit like fury ;  
 And the progeny of Jacob  
 Did on the main-deck wake up.  
 (I wot these greasy Rabbins  
 Would never pay for cabins) ;  
 And each man moaned and jabbered in  
 His filthy Jewish gaberdine,  
 In woe and lamentation,  
 And howling consternation.  
 And the splashing water drenches  
 Their dirty brats and wenchens ;  
 And they crawl from bales and benches,  
 In a hundred thousand stenchens.  
 This was the White Squall famous,  
 Which latterly o'ercame us.

*Peg of Limavaddy* has always been very popular, and the public have not, I think, been generally aware that the young lady in question lived in truth at Newton Limavady (with one d). But with the correct name Thackeray would hardly have been so successful with his rhymes.

Citizen or Squire  
 Tory, Whig, or Radi-  
 Cal would all desire  
 Peg of Limavaddy.  
 Had I Homer's fire  
 Or that of Sergeant Taddy

Meety I'd admire  
 Peg of Limavaddy.  
 And till I expire  
 Or till I go mad I  
 Will sing unto my lyre  
 Peg of Limavaddy.

*The Cane-bottomed Chair* is another, better, I think, than *Peg of Limavaddy*, as containing that mixture of burlesque with the pathetic which belonged so peculiarly to Thackeray, and which was indeed the very essence of his genius.

But of all the cheap treasures that garnish my nest,  
 There's one that I love and I cherish the best.  
 For the finest of couches that's padded with hair  
 I never would change thee, my cane-bottomed chair.

'Tis a bandy-legged, high-bottomed, worm-caten seat,  
 With a creaking old back and twisted old feet;  
 But since the fair morning when Fanny sat there,  
 I bless thee and love thee, old cane-bottomed chair.

\* \* \* \* \*

She comes from the past and revisits my room,  
 She looks as she then did, all beauty and bloom;  
 So smiling and tender, so fresh and so fair,  
 And yonder she sits in my cane-bottomed chair.

This, in the volume which I have now before me, is followed by a picture of Fanny in the chair, to which I cannot but take exception. I am quite sure that when Fanny graced the room and seated herself in the chair of her old bachelor friend, she had not on a low dress and loosely-flowing drawing-room shawl, nor was there a footstool ready for her feet. I doubt also the headgear. Fanny on that occasion was dressed in her morning apparel, and had walked through the streets, carried no fan, and wore

no brooch but one that might be necessary for pinning her shawl.

*The Great Cossack Epic* is the longest of the ballads. It is a legend of St. Sophia of Kioff, telling how Father Hyacinth, by the aid of St. Sophia, whose wooden statue he carried with him, escaped across the Borysthenes with all the Cossacks at his tail. It is very good fun, but not equal to many of the others. Nor is the *Carmen Lillense* quite to my taste. I should not have declared at once that it had come from Thackeray's hand, had I not known it.

But who could doubt the *Bouillabaisse*? Who else could have written that? Who at the same moment could have been so merry and so melancholy—could have gone so deep into the regrets of life, with words so appropriate to its jollities? I do not know how far my readers will agree with me that to read it always must be a fresh pleasure; but in order that they may agree with me, if they can, I will give it to them entire. If there be one whom it does not please, he will like nothing that Thackeray ever wrote in verse.

#### THE BALLAD OF BOUILLABAISSE.

A street there is in Paris famous,  
 For which no rhyme our language yields,  
 Rue Neuve des Petits Champs its name is—  
 The New Street of the Little Fields;  
 And here's an inn, not rich and splendid,  
 But still in comfortable case;  
 The which in youth I oft attended,  
 To eat a bowl of Bouillabaisse.

This Bouillabaisse a noble dish is—  
 A sort of soup, or broth, or brew,  
 Or hotch-potch of all sorts of fishes,  
 That Greenwich never could outdo;

Green herbs, red peppers, mussels, saffron,  
 Soles, onions, garlic, roach, and dace :  
 All these you eat at Terré's tavern,  
 In that one dish of Bouillabaisse.

Indeed, a rich and savoury stew 'tis ;  
 And true philosophers, methinks,  
 Who love all sorts of natural beauties,  
 Should love good victuals and good drinks.  
 And Cordelier or Benedictine  
 Might gladly sure his lot embrace,  
 Nor find a fast-day too afflicting  
 Which served him up a Bouillabaisse.

I wonder if the house still there is ?  
 Yes, here the lamp is, as before ;  
 The smiling red-cheeked écaillère is  
 Still opening oysters at the door.  
 Is Terré still alive and able ?  
 I recollect his droll grimace ;  
 He'd come and smile before your table,  
 And hope you liked your Bouillabaisse.

We enter—nothing's changed or older.  
 "How's Monsieur Terré, waiter, pray ?"  
 The waiter stares and shrugs his shoulder—  
 "Monsieur is dead this many a day."  
 "It is the lot of saint and sinner ;  
 So honest Terré's run his race."  
 "What will Monsieur require for dinner ?"  
 "Say, do you still cook Bouillabaisse ?"  
 "Oh, oui, Monsieur," 's the waiter's answer,  
 "Quel vin Monsieur desire-t-il ?"  
 "Tell me a good one." "That I can, sir :  
 The chambertin with yellow seal."  
 "So Terré's gone," I say, and sink in  
 My old accustom'd corner-place ;  
 "He's done with feasting and with drinking,  
 With Burgundy and Bouillabaisse."

My old accustomed corner here is,  
 The table still is in the nook ;  
 Ah ! vanish'd many a busy year is  
 This well-known chair since last I took.  
 When first I saw ye, cari luoghi,  
 I'd scarce a beard upon my face,  
 And now a grizzled, grim old foggy,  
 I sit and wait for Bouillabaisse.

Where are you, old companions trusty,  
 Of early days here met to dine ?  
 Come, waiter ! quick, a flagon crusty ;  
 I'll pledge them in the good old wine.  
 The kind old voices and old faces  
 My memory can quick retrace ;  
 Around the board they take their places,  
 And share the wine and Bouillabaisse.

There's Jack has made a wondrous marriage ;  
 There's laughing Tom is laughing yet ;  
 There's brave Augustus drives his carriage ;  
 There's poor old Fred in the *Gazette* ;  
 O'er James's head the grass is growing.  
 Good Lord ! the world has wagged apace  
 Since here we set the claret flowing,  
 And drank, and ate the Bouillabaisse.

Ah me ! how quick the days are fitting !  
 I mind me of a time that's gone,  
 When here I'd sit, as now I'm sitting,  
 In this same place—but not alone.  
 A fair young face was nestled near me,  
 A dear, dear face looked fondly up,  
 And sweetly spoke and smiled to cheer me ?  
 There's no one now to share my cup.

\* \* \* \* \*

I drink it as the Fates ordain it.  
 Come fill it, and have done with rhymes ;  
 Fill up the lonely glass, and drain it  
 In memory of dear old times.

Welcome the wine, whate'er the seal is ;  
And sit you down and say your grace  
With thankful heart, whate'er the meal is.  
Here comes the smoking Bouillabaisse.

I am not disposed to say that Thackeray will hold a high place among English poets. He would have been the first to ridicule such an assumption made on his behalf. But I think that his verses will be more popular than those of many highly reputed poets, and that as years roll on they will gain rather than lose in public estimation.



## CHAPTER IX.

### THACKERAY'S STYLE AND MANNER OF WORK.

A NOVEL in style should be easy, lucid, and of course grammatical. The same may be said of any book; but that which is intended to recreate should be easily understood--for which purpose lucid narration is an essential. In matter it should be moral and amusing. In manner it may be realistic, or sublime, or ludicrous; or it may be all these if the author can combine them. As to Thackeray's performance in style and matter I will say something further on. His manner was mainly realistic, and I will therefore speak first of that mode of expression which was peculiarly his own.

Realism in style has not all the ease which seems to belong to it. It is the object of the author who affects it so to communicate with his reader that all his words shall seem to be natural to the occasion. We do not think the language of Dogberry natural, when he tells neighbour Seacole that "to write and read comes by nature." That is ludicrous. Nor is the language of Hamlet natural when he shows to his mother the portrait of his father:

See what a grace was seated on this brow;  
Hyperion's curls; the front of Jove himself;  
An eye like Mars, to threaten and command,

That is sublime. Constance is natural when she turns away from the Cardinal, declaring that

He talks to me that never had a son.

In one respect both the sublime and ludicrous are easier than the realistic. They are not required to be true. A man with an imagination and culture may feign either of them without knowing the ways of men. To be realistic you must know accurately that which you describe. How often do we find in novels that the author makes an attempt at realism and falls into a bathos of absurdity, because he cannot use appropriate language? "No human being ever spoke like that," we say to ourselves—while we should not question the naturalness of the production, either in the grand or the ridiculous.

And yet in very truth the realistic must not be true—but just so far removed from truth as to suit the erroneous idea of truth which the reader may be supposed to entertain. For were a novelist to narrate a conversation between two persons of fair but not high education, and to use the ill-arranged words and fragments of speech which are really common in such conversations, he would seem to have sunk to the ludicrous, and to be attributing to the interlocutors a mode of language much beneath them. Though in fact true, it would seem to be far from natural. But, on the other hand, were he to put words grammatically correct into the mouths of his personages, and to round off and to complete the spoken sentences, the ordinary reader would instantly feel such a style to be stilted and unreal. This reader would not analyse it, but would in some dim but sufficiently critical manner be aware that his author was not providing him with a naturally spoken dialogue. To produce the desired effect the narrator must go be

tween the two. He must mount somewhat above the ordinary conversational powers of such persons as are to be represented—lest he disgust. But he must by no means soar into correct phraseology—lest he offend. The realistic—by which we mean that which shall seem to be real—lies between the two, and in reaching it the writer has not only to keep his proper distance on both sides, but has to maintain varying distances in accordance with the position, mode of life, and education of the speakers. Lady Castlewood in *Esmond* would not have been properly made to speak with absolute precision; but she goes nearer to the mark than her more ignorant lord, the viscount; less near, however, than her better-educated kinsman, Henry Esmond. He, however, is not made to speak altogether by the card, or he would be unnatural. Nor would each of them speak always in the same strain, but they would alter their language according to their companion—according even to the hour of the day. All this the reader unconsciously perceives, and will not think the language to be natural unless the proper variations be there.

In simple narrative the rule is the same as in dialogue, though it does not admit of the same palpable deviation from correct construction. The story of any incident, to be realistic, will admit neither of sesquipedalian grandeur nor of grotesque images. The one gives an idea of romance and the other of burlesque, to neither of which is truth supposed to appertain. We desire to soar frequently, and then we try romance. We desire to recreate ourselves with the easy and droll. *Dulce est desipere in loco*. Then we have recourse to burlesque. But in neither do we expect human nature.

I cannot but think that in the hands of the novelist the middle course is the most powerful. Much as we may

delight in burlesque, we cannot claim for it the power of achieving great results. So much, I think, will be granted. For the sublime we look rather to poetry than to prose; and though I will give one or two instances just now in which it has been used with great effect in prose fiction, it does not come home to the heart, teaching a lesson, as does the realistic. The girl who reads is touched by Lucy Ashton, but she feels herself to be convinced of the facts as to Jeanie Deans, and asks herself whether she might not emulate them.

Now as to the realism of Thackeray, I must rather appeal to my readers than attempt to prove it by quotation. Whoever it is that speaks in his pages, does it not seem that such a person would certainly have used such words on such an occasion? If there be need of examination to learn whether it be so or not, let the reader study all that falls from the mouth of Lady Castlewood through the novel called *Esmond*, or all that falls from the mouth of Beatrix. They are persons peculiarly situated—noble women, but who have still lived much out of the world. The former is always conscious of a sorrow; the latter is always striving after an effect—and both on this account are difficult of management. A period for the story has been chosen which is strange and unknown to us, and which has required a peculiar language. One would have said beforehand that whatever might be the charms of the book, it would not be natural. And yet the ear is never wounded by a tone that is false. It is not always the case that in novel reading the ear should be wounded because the words spoken are unnatural. Bulwer does not wound, though he never puts into the mouth of any of his persons words such as would have been spoken. They are not expected from him. It is something else that he provides

From Thackeray they are expected—and from many others. But Thackeray never disappoints. Whether it be a great duke, such as he who was to have married Beatrix, or a mean chaplain, such as Tusher, or Captain Steele the humorist, they talk—not as they would have talked probably, of which I am no judge—but as we feel that they might have talked. We find ourselves willing to take it as proved because it is there, which is the strongest possible evidence of the realistic capacity of the writer.

As to the sublime in novels, it is not to be supposed that any very high rank of sublimity is required to put such works within the pale of that definition. I allude to those in which an attempt is made to soar above the ordinary actions and ordinary language of life. We may take as an instance *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. That is intended to be sublime throughout. Even the writer never for a moment thought of descending to real life. She must have been untrue to her own idea of her own business had she done so. It is all stilted—all of a certain altitude among the clouds. It has been in its time a popular book, and has had its world of readers. Those readers no doubt preferred the diluted romance of Mrs. Radcliff to the condensed realism of Fielding. At any rate, they did not look for realism. *Pelham* may be taken as another instance of the sublime, though there is so much in it that is of the world worldly, though an intentional fall to the ludicrous is often made in it. The personages talk in glittering dialogues, throwing about philosophy, science, and the classics, in a manner which is always suggestive and often amusing. The book is brilliant with intellect. But no word is ever spoken as it would have been spoken—no detail is ever narrated as it would have occurred. Bulwer no doubt regarded novels as romantic, and would have looked

with contempt on any junction of realism and romance, though, in varying his work, he did not think it beneath him to vary his sublimity with the ludicrous. The sublime in novels is no doubt most effective when it breaks out, as though by some burst of nature, in the midst of a story true to life. "If," said Evan Maccombich, "the Saxon gentlemen are laughing because a poor man such as me thinks my life, or the life of six of my degree, is worth that of Vich Ian Vohr, it's like enough they may be very right; but if they laugh because they think I would not keep my word and come back to redeem him, I can tell them they ken neither the heart of a Hielandman nor the honour of a gentleman." That is sublime. And, again, when Balfour of Burley slaughters Bothwell, the death scene is sublime. "Die, bloodthirsty dog!" said Burley. "Die as thou hast lived! Die like the beasts that perish—hoping nothing, believing nothing!"—"And fearing nothing," said Bothwell. Horrible as is the picture, it is sublime. As is also that speech of Meg Merrilies, as she addresses Mr. Bertram, standing on the bank. "Ride your ways," said the gipsy; "ride your ways, Laird of Ellangowan; ride your ways, Godfrey Bertram. This day have ye quenched seven smoking hearths; see if the fire in your ain parlour burn the blyther for that. Ye have riven the thack off seven cottar houses; look if your ain roof-tree stand the faster. Ye may stable your stirks in the shealings at Derneleugh; see that the hare does not couch on the hearthstane at Ellangowan." That is romance, and reaches the very height of the sublime. That does not offend, impossible though it be that any old woman should have spoken such words, because it does in truth lift the reader up among the bright stars. It is thus that the sublime may be mingled with the realistic, if the writer has

the power. Thackeray also rises in that way to a high pitch, though not in many instances. Romance does not often justify to him an absence of truth. The scene between Lady Castlewood and the Duke of Hamilton is one when she explains to her child's suitor who Henry Esmond is. "My daughter may receive presents from the head of our house," says the lady, speaking up for her kinsman. "My daughter may thankfully take kindness from her father's, her mother's, her brother's dearest friend." The whole scene is of the same nature, and is evidence of Thackeray's capacity for the sublime. And again, when the same lady welcomes the same kinsman on his return from the wars, she rises as high. But as I have already quoted a part of the passage in the chapter on this novel, I will not repeat it here.

It may perhaps be said of the sublime in novels—which I have endeavoured to describe as not being generally of a high order—that it is apt to become cold, stilted, and unsatisfactory. What may be done by impossible castles among impossible mountains, peopled by impossible heroes and heroines, and fraught with impossible horrors, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* have shown us. But they require a patient reader, and one who can content himself with a long protracted and most unemotional excitement. The sublimity which is effected by sparkling speeches is better, if the speeches really have something in them beneath the sparkles. Those of Bulwer generally have. Those of his imitators are often without anything, the sparkles even hardly sparkling. At the best they fatigue; and a novel, if it fatigues, is unpardonable. Its only excuse is to be found in the amusement it affords. It should instruct also, no doubt, but it never will do so unless it hides its instruction and amuses. Scott understood all this, when

he allowed himself only such sudden bursts as I have described. Even in *The Bride of Lammermoor*, which I do not regard as among the best of his performances, as he soars high into the sublime, so does he descend low into the ludicrous.

In this latter division of pure fiction—the burlesque, as it is commonly called, or the ludicrous—Thackeray is quite as much at home as in the realistic, though, the vehicle being less powerful, he has achieved smaller results by it. Manifest as are the objects in his view when he wrote *The Hoggarty Diamond* or *The Legend of the Rhine*, they were less important and less evidently effected than those attempted by *Vanity Fair* and *Pendennis*. Captain Shindy, the Snob, does not tell us so plainly what is not a gentleman as does Colonel Newcome what is. Nevertheless, the ludicrous has, with Thackeray, been very powerful and very delightful.

In trying to describe what is done by literature of this class, it is especially necessary to remember that different readers are affected in a different way. That which is one man's meat is another man's poison. In the sublime, when the really grand has been reached, it is the reader's own fault if he be not touched. We know that many are indifferent to the soliloquies of Hamlet, but we do not hesitate to declare to ourselves that they are so because they lack the power of appreciating grand language. We do not scruple to attribute to those who are indifferent some inferiority of intelligence. And in regard to the realistic, when the truth of a well-told story or life-like character does not come home, we think that then, too, there is deficiency in the critical ability. But there is nothing necessarily lacking to a man because he does not enjoy *The Heathen Chinees* or *The Biglow Papers*; and



the man to whom these delights of America: humour are leather and prunello may be of all the most enraptured by the wit of Sam Weller or the mock piety of Pecksniff. It is a matter of taste and not of intellect, as one man likes caviare after his dinner, while another prefers apple-pie; and the man himself cannot, or, as far as we can see, does not, direct his own taste in the one matter more than in the other.

Therefore I cannot ask others to share with me the delight which I have in the various and peculiar expressions of the ludicrous which are common to Thackeray. Some considerable portion of it consists in bad spelling. We may say that Charles James Harrington Fitzroy Yellowplush, or C. FitzJeames De La Pluche, as he is afterwards called, would be nothing but for his "orthogwaphy so carefully inaccuwate." As I have before said, Mrs. Malaprop had seemed to have reached the height of this humour, and in having done so to have made any repetition unpalatable. But Thackeray's studied blundering is altogether different from that of Sheridan. Mrs. Malaprop uses her words in a delightfully wrong sense. Yellowplush would be a very intelligible, if not quite an accurate writer, had he not made for himself special forms of English words altogether new to the eye.

"My ma wrapped up my buth in a mistry. I may be illygitmit; I may have been changed at nus; but I've always had gen'l'm'nly tastes through life, and have no doubt that I come of a gen'l'm'nly origum." We cannot admit that there is wit, or even humour, in bad spelling alone. Were it not that Yellowplush, with his bad spelling, had so much to say for himself, there would be nothing in it; but there is always a sting of satire directed against some real vice, or some growing vulgarity, which is

made sharper by the absurdity of the language. In *The Diary of George IV.* there are the following reflections on a certain correspondence: "Wooden you phansy, now, that the author of such a letter, instead of writun about pipple of tip-top quality, was describin' Vinegar Yard? Would you beleave that the lady he was a-ritin' to was a chased modist lady of honour and mother of a family? *O trumpery! o morris!* as Homer says. This is a higeous pictur of manners, such as I weap to think of, as every morl man must weap." We do not wonder that when he makes his "ajew" he should have been called up to be congratulated on the score of his literary performances by his master, before the Duke, and Lord Bagwig, and Dr. Larner, and "Sawedwadgeorgeearlittbulwig." All that Yellowplush says or writes are among the pearls which Thackeray was continually scattering abroad.

But this of the distinguished footman was only one of the forms of the ludicrous which he was accustomed to use in the furtherance of some purpose which he had at heart. It was his practice to clothe things most revolting with an assumed grace and dignity, and to add to the weight of his condemnation by the astounding mendacity of the parody thus drawn. There was a grim humour in this which has been displeasing to some, as seeming to hold out to vice a hand which has appeared for too long a time to be friendly. As we are disposed to be not altogether sympathetic with a detective policeman who shall have spent a jolly night with a delinquent, for the sake of tracing home the suspected guilt to his late comrade, so are some disposed to be almost angry with our author, who seems to be too much at home with his rascals, and to live with them on familiar terms till we doubt whether he does not forget their rascality. *Barry Lyndon* is the

strongest example we have of this style of the ludicrous, and the critics of whom I speak have thought that our friendly relations with Barry have been too genial, too apparently genuine, so that it might almost be doubtful whether during the narrative we might not, at this or the other crisis, be rather with him than against him. "After all," the reader might say, on coming to that passage in which Barry defends his trade as a gambler—a passage which I have quoted in speaking of the novel—"after all, this man is more hero than scoundrel;" so well is the burlesque humour maintained, so well does the scoundrel hide his own villany. I can easily understand that to some it should seem too long drawn out. To me it seems to be the perfection of humour—and of philosophy. If such a one as Barry Lyndon, a man full of intellect, can be made thus to love and cherish his vice, and to believe in its beauty, how much more necessary is it to avoid the footsteps which lead to it? But, as I have said above, there is no standard by which to judge of the excellence of the ludicrous as there is of the sublime, and even the realistic.

No writer ever had a stronger proclivity towards parody than Thackeray; and we may, I think, confess that there is no form of literary drollery more dangerous. The parody will often mar the gem of which it coarsely reproduces the outward semblance. The word "damaged," used instead of "damask," has destroyed to my ear for ever the music of one of the sweetest passages in Shakespeare. But it must be acknowledged of Thackeray that, fond as he is of this branch of humour, he has done little or no injury by his parodies. They run over with fun, but are so contrived that they do not lessen the flavour of the original. I have given in one of the preceding chap-

ters a little set of verses of his own, called *The Willow Tree*, and his own parody on his own work. There the reader may see how effective a parody may be in destroying the sentiment of the piece parodied. But in dealing with other authors he has been grotesque without being severely critical, and has been very like, without making ugly or distasteful that which he has imitated. No one who has admired *Coningsby* will admire it the less because of *Codlingsby*. Nor will the undoubted romance of *Eugene Aram* be lessened in the estimation of any reader of novels by the well-told career of *George de Barnwell*. One may say that to laugh *Ivanhoe* out of face, or to lessen the glory of that immortal story, would be beyond the power of any farcical effect. Thackeray, in his *Rowena and Rebecca*, certainly had no such purpose. Nothing of *Ivanhoe* is injured, nothing made less valuable than it was before, yet, of all prose parodies in the language, it is perhaps the most perfect. Every character is maintained, every incident has a taste of Scott. It has the twang of *Ivanhoe* from beginning to end, and yet there is not a word in it by which the author of *Ivanhoe* could have been offended. But then there is the purpose beyond that of the mere parody. Prudish women have to be laughed at, and despotic kings, and parasite lords and bishops. The ludicrous alone is but poor fun; but when the ludicrous has a meaning, it can be very effective in the hands of such a master as this.

“He to die!” resumed the bishop. “He a mortal like to us!  
 Death was not for him intended, though *communis omnibus*.  
 Keeper, you are irreligious, for to talk and cavil thus!”

So much I have said of the manner in which Thackeray did his work, endeavouring to represent human nature as

he saw it, so that his readers should learn to love what is good, and to hate what is evil. As to the merits of his style, it will be necessary to insist on them the less, because it has been generally admitted to be easy, lucid, and grammatical. I call that style easy by which the writer has succeeded in conveying to the reader that which the reader is intended to receive with the least possible amount of trouble to him. I call that style lucid which conveys to the reader most accurately all that the writer wishes to convey on any subject. The two virtues will, I think, be seen to be very different. An author may wish to give an idea that a certain flavour is bitter. He shall leave a conviction that it is simply disagreeable. Then he is not lucid. But he shall convey so much as that, in such a manner as to give the reader no trouble in arriving at the conclusion. Therefore he is easy. The subject here suggested is as little complicated as possible; but in the intercourse which is going on continually between writers and readers, affairs of all degrees of complication are continually being discussed, of a nature so complicated that the inexperienced writer is puzzled at every turn to express himself, and the altogether inartistic writer fails to do so. Who among writers has not to acknowledge that he is often unable to tell all that he has to tell? Words refuse to do it for him. He struggles and stumbles and alters and adds, but finds at last that he has gone either too far or not quite far enough. Then there comes upon him the necessity of choosing between two evils. He must either give up the fulness of his thought, and content himself with presenting some fragment of it in that lucid arrangement of words which he affects; or he must bring out his thought with ambages; he must mass his sentences inconsequentially; he must struggle up hill almost

hopelessly with his phrases—so that at the end the reader will have to labour as he himself has laboured, or else to leave behind much of the fruit which it has been intended that he should garner. It is the ill-fortune of some to be neither easy or lucid; and there is nothing more wonderful in the history of letters than the patience of readers when called upon to suffer under the double calamity. It is as though a man were reading a dialogue of Plato, understanding neither the subject nor the language. But it is often the case that one has to be sacrificed to the other. The pregnant writer will sometimes solace himself by declaring that it is not his business to supply intelligence to the reader; and then, in throwing out the entirety of his thought, will not stop to remember that he cannot hope to scatter his ideas far and wide unless he can make them easily intelligible. Then the writer who is determined that his book shall not be put down because it is troublesome, is too apt to avoid the knotty bits and shirk the rocky turns, because he cannot with ease to himself make them easy to others. If this be acknowledged, I shall be held to be right in saying not only that ease and lucidity in style are different virtues, but that they are often opposed to each other. They may, however, be combined, and then the writer will have really learned the art of writing. *Omne tulit punctum qui miscuit utile dulci.* It is to be done, I believe, in all languages. A man by art and practice shall at least obtain such a masterhood over words as to express all that he thinks, in phrases that shall be easily understood.

In such a small space as can here be allowed, I cannot give instances to prove that this has been achieved by Thackeray. Nor would instances prove the existence of the virtue, though instances might the absence. The proof

lies in the work of the man's life, and can only become plain to those who have read his writings. I must refer readers to their own experiences, and ask them whether they have found themselves compelled to study passages in Thackeray in order that they might find a recondite meaning, or whether they have not been sure that they and the author have together understood all that there was to understand in the matter. Have they run backward over the passages, and then gone on, not quite sure what the author has meant? If not, then he has been easy and lucid. We have not had it so easy with all modern writers, nor with all that are old. I may best, perhaps, explain my meaning by taking something written long ago; something very valuable, in order that I may not damage my argument by comparing the easiness of Thackeray with the harshness of some author who has in other respects failed of obtaining approbation. If you take the play of *Cymbeline*, you will, I think, find it to be anything but easy reading. Nor is Shakespeare always lucid. For purposes of his own he will sometimes force his readers to doubt his meaning, even after prolonged study. It has ever been so with *Hamlet*. My readers will not, I think, be so crossgrained with me as to suppose that I am putting Thackeray as a master of style above Shakespeare. I am only endeavouring to explain by reference to the great master the condition of literary production which he attained. Whatever Thackeray says, the reader cannot fail to understand; and whatever Thackeray attempts to communicate, he succeeds in conveying.

That he is grammatical I must leave to my readers' judgment, with a simple assertion in his favour. There are some who say that grammar—by which I mean accuracy of composition, in accordance with certain acknowl-

edged rules—is only a means to an end; and that, if a writer can absolutely achieve the end by some other mode of his own, he need not regard the prescribed means. If a man can so write as to be easily understood, and to convey lucidly that which he has to convey without accuracy of grammar, why should he subject himself to unnecessary trammels? Why not make a path for himself, if the path so made will certainly lead him whither he wishes to go? The answer is, that no other path will lead others whither he wishes to carry them but that which is common to him and to those others. It is necessary that there should be a ground equally familiar to the writer and to his readers. If there be no such common ground, they will certainly not come into full accord. There have been recusants who, by a certain acuteness of their own, have partly done so—wilful recusants; but they have been recusants, not to the extent of discarding grammar—which no writer could do and not be altogether in the dark—but so far as to have created for themselves a phraseology which has been picturesque by reason of its illicit vagaries; as a woman will sometimes please ill-instructed eyes and ears by little departures from feminine propriety. They have probably laboured in their vocation as sedulously as though they had striven to be correct, and have achieved at the best but a short-lived success—as is the case also with the unconventional female. The charm of the disorderly soon loses itself in the ugliness of disorder. And there are others rebellious from grammar, who are, however, hardly to be called rebels, because the laws which they break have never been altogether known to them. Among those very dear to me in English literature, one or two might be named of either sort, whose works, though they have that in them which will insure to



them a long life, will become from year to year less valuable and less venerable, because their authors have either scorned or have not known that common ground of language on which the author and his readers should stand together. My purport here is only with Thackeray, and I say that he stands always on that common ground. He quarrels with none of the laws. As the lady who is most attentive to conventional propriety may still have her own fashion of dress and her own mode of speech, so had Thackeray very manifestly his own style; but it is one the correctness of which has never been impugned.

I hold that gentleman to be the best dressed whose dress no one observes. I am not sure but that the same may be said of an author's written language. Only, where shall we find an example of such perfection? Always easy, always lucid, always correct, we may find them; but who is the writer, easy, lucid, and correct, who has not impregnated his writing with something of that personal flavour which we call mannerism? To speak of authors well known to all readers—Does not *The Rambler* taste of Johnson; *The Decline and Fall*, of Gibbon; *The Middle Ages*, of Hallam; *The History of England*, of Macaulay; and *The Invasion of the Crimea*, of Kinglake? Do we not know the elephantine tread of *The Saturday*, and the precise toe of *The Spectator*? I have sometimes thought that Swift has been nearest to the mark of any—writing English and not writing Swift. But I doubt whether an accurate observer would not trace even here the “mark of the beast.” Thackeray, too, has a strong flavour of Thackeray. I am inclined to think that his most besetting sin in style—the little ear-mark by which he is most conspicuous—is a certain affected familiarity. He indulges too frequently in little confidences with individual

readers, in which pretended allusions to himself are frequent. "What would you do? what would you say now, if you were in such a position?" he asks. He describes this practice of his in the preface to *Pendennis*. "It is a sort of confidential talk between writer and reader. . . . In the course of his volubility the perpetual speaker must of necessity lay bare his own weaknesses, vanities, peculiarities." In the short contributions to periodicals on which he tried his 'prentice hand, such addresses and conversations were natural and efficacious; but in a larger work of fiction they cause an absence of that dignity to which even a novel may aspire. You feel that each morsel as you read it is a detached bit, and that it has all been written in detachments. The book is robbed of its integrity by a certain good-humoured geniality of language, which causes the reader to be almost too much at home with his author. There is a saying that familiarity breeds contempt, and I have been sometimes inclined to think that our author has sometimes failed to stand up for himself with sufficiency of "personal deportment."

In other respects Thackeray's style is excellent. As I have said before, the reader always understands his words without an effort, and receives all that the author has to give.

There now remains to be discussed the matter of our author's work. The manner and the style are but the natural wrappings in which the goods have been prepared for the market. Of these goods it is no doubt true that unless the wrappings be in some degree meritorious the article will not be accepted at all; but it is the kernel which we seek, which, if it be not of itself sweet and digestible, cannot be made serviceable by any shell, however pretty or easy to be cracked. I have said previously that

it is the business of a novel to instruct in morals and to amuse. I will go further, and will add, having been for many years a most prolific writer of novels myself, that I regard him who can put himself into close communication with young people year after year without making some attempt to do them good as a very sorry fellow indeed. However poor your matter may be, however near you may come to that "foolishest of existing mortals," as Carlyle presumes some unfortunate novelist to be, still, if there be those who read your works, they will undoubtedly be more or less influenced by what they find there. And it is because the novelist amuses that he is thus influential. The sermon too often has no such effect, because it is applied with the declared intention of having it. The palpable and overt dose the child rejects; but that which is cunningly insinuated by the aid of jam or honey is accepted unconsciously, and goes on upon its curative mission. So it is with the novel. It is taken because of its jam and honey. But, unlike the honest simple jam and honey of the household cupboard, it is never unmixed with physic. There will be the dose within it, either curative or poisonous. The girl will be taught modesty or immodesty, truth or falsehood; the lad will be taught honour or dishonour, simplicity or affectation. Without the lesson the amusement will not be there. There are novels which certainly can teach nothing; but then neither can they amuse any one.

I should be said to insist absurdly on the power of my own confraternity if I were to declare that the bulk of the young people in the upper and middle classes receive their moral teaching chiefly from the novels they read. Mothers would no doubt think of their own sweet teaching; fathers of the examples which they set; and schoolmas-

ters of the excellence of their instructions. Happy is the country that has such mothers, fathers, and schoolmasters! But the novelist creeps in closer than the schoolmaster, closer than the father, closer almost than the mother. He is the chosen guide, the tutor whom the young pupil chooses for herself. She retires with him, suspecting no lesson, safe against rebuke, throwing herself head and heart into the narration as she can hardly do into her task-work; and there she is taught—how she shall learn to love; how she shall receive the lover when he comes; how far she should advance to meet the joy; why she should be reticent, and not throw herself at once into this new delight. It is the same with the young man, though he would be more prone even than she to reject the suspicion of such tutorship. But he too will there learn either to speak the truth, or to lie; and will receive from his novel lessons either of real manliness, or of that affected apishness and tailor-begotten demeanour which too many professors of the craft give out as their dearest precepts.

At any rate the close intercourse is admitted. Where is the house now from which novels are tabooed? Is it not common to allow them almost indiscriminately, so that young and old each chooses his own novel? Shall he, then, to whom this close fellowship is allowed—this inner confidence—shall he not be careful what words he uses, and what thoughts he expresses, when he sits in council with his young friend? This, which it will certainly be his duty to consider with so much care, will be the matter of his work. We know what was thought of such matter when Lydia in the play was driven to the necessity of flinging "*Peregrine Pickle* under the toilet," and thrusting "*Lord Aimwell* under the sofa." We have got beyond that now, and are tolerably sure that our girls do not

hide their novels. The more freely they are allowed, the more necessary is it that he who supplies shall take care that they are worthy of the trust that is given to them.

Now let the reader ask himself what are the lessons which Thackeray has taught. Let him send his memory running back over all those characters of whom we have just been speaking, and ask himself whether any girl has been taught to be immodest, or any man unmanly, by what Thackeray has written. A novelist has two modes of teaching—by good example or bad. It is not to be supposed that because the person treated of be evil, therefore the precept will be evil. If so, some personages with whom we have been made well acquainted from our youth upwards would have been omitted in our early lessons. It may be a question whether the teaching is not more efficacious which comes from the evil example. What story was ever more powerful in showing the beauty of feminine reticence, and the horrors of feminine evil-doing, than the fate of Effie Deans? The Templar would have betrayed a woman to his lust, but has not encouraged others by the freedom of his life. Varney was utterly bad—but though a gay courtier, he has enticed no others to go the way that he went. So it has been with Thackeray. His examples have been generally of that kind—but they have all been efficacious in their teaching on the side of modesty and manliness, truth and simplicity. When some girl shall have traced from first to last the character of Beatrice, what, let us ask, will be the result on her mind? Beatrice was born noble, clever, beautiful, with certain material advantages, which it was within her compass to improve by her nobility, wit, and beauty. She was quite alive to that fact, and thought of those material advantages, to the utter exclusion, in our mind, of any idea of moral goodness.

She realised it all, and told herself that that was the game she would play. "Twenty-five!" says she; "and in eight years no man has ever touched my heart!" That is her boast when she is about to be married—her only boast of herself. "A most detestable young woman!" some will say. "An awful example!" others will add. Not a doubt of it. She proves the misery of her own career so fully that no one will follow it. The example is so awful that it will surely deter. The girl will declare to herself that not in that way will she look for the happiness which she hopes to enjoy; and the young man will say, as he reads it, that no Beatrix shall touch his heart.

You may go through all his characters with the same effect. Pendennis will be scorned because he is light; Warrington loved because he is strong and merciful; Dobbin will be honoured because he is unselfish; and the old colonel, though he be foolish, vain, and weak, almost worshipped because he is so true a gentleman. It is in the handling of questions such as these that we have to look for the matter of the novelist—those moral lessons which he mixes up with his jam and his honey. I say that with Thackeray the physic is always curative and never poisonous. He may be admitted safely into that close fellowship, and be allowed to accompany the dear ones to their retreats. The girl will never become bold under his preaching, or taught to throw herself at men's heads. Nor will the lad receive a false flashy idea of what becomes a youth, when he is first about to take his place among men.

As to that other question, whether Thackeray be amusing as well as salutary, I must leave it to public opinion. There is now being brought out of his works a more splendid edition than has ever been produced in any age or any country of the writings of such an author. A cer

tain fixed number of copies only is being issued, and each copy will cost £33 12s. when completed. It is understood that a very large proportion of the edition has been already bought or ordered. Cost, it will be said, is a bad test of excellence. It will not prove the merit of a book any more than it will of a horse. But it is proof of the popularity of the book. Print and illustrate and bind up some novels how you will, no one will buy them. Previous to these costly volumes, there have been two entire editions of his works since the author's death, one comparatively cheap and the other dear. Before his death his stories had been scattered in all imaginable forms. I may therefore assert that their charm has been proved by their popularity.

There remains for us only this question—whether the nature of Thackeray's works entitle him to be called a cynic. The word is one which is always used in a bad sense. "Of a dog; currish," is the definition which we get from Johnson—quite correctly, and in accordance with its etymology. And he gives us examples. "How vilely does this cynic rhyme," he takes from Shakespeare; and Addison speaks of a man degenerating into a cynic. That Thackeray's nature was soft and kindly—gentle almost to a fault—has been shown elsewhere. But they who have called him a cynic have spoken of him merely as a writer—and as writer he has certainly taken upon himself the special task of barking at the vices and follies of the world around him. Any satirist might in the same way be called a cynic in so far as his satire goes. Swift was a cynic, certainly. Pope was cynical when he was a satirist. Juvenal was all cynical, because he was all satirist. If that be what is meant, Thackeray was certainly a cynic. But that is not all that the word implies. It intends to go back beyond the work of the man, and to describe his

heart. It says of any satirist so described that he has given himself up to satire, not because things have been evil, but because he himself has been evil. Hamlet is a satirist, whereas Thersites is a cynic. If Thackeray be judged after this fashion, the word is as inappropriate to the writer as to the man.

But it has to be confessed that Thackeray did allow his intellect to be too thoroughly saturated with the aspect of the ill side of things. We can trace the operation of his mind from his earliest days, when he commenced his parodies at school; when he brought out *The Snob* at Cambridge, when he sent *Yellowplush* out upon the world as a satirist on the doings of gentlemen generally; when he wrote his *Catherine*, to show the vileness of the taste for what he would have called Newgate literature; and *The Hoggarty Diamond*, to attack bubble companies; and *Barry Lyndon*, to expose the pride which a rascal may take in his rascality. Becky Sharp, Major Pendennis, Beatrix, both as a young and as an old woman, were written with the same purpose. There is a touch of satire in every drawing that he made. A jeer is needed for something that is ridiculous, scorn has to be thrown on something that is vile. The same feeling is to be found in every line of every ballad.

#### VANITAS VANITATUM.

Methinks the text is never stale,  
 And life is every day renewing  
 Fresh comments on the old old tale,  
 Of Folly, Fortune, Glory, Ruin.

Hark to the preacher, preaching still!  
 He lifts his voice and cries his sermon,  
 Here at St. Peter's of Cornhill,  
 As yonder on the Mount of Hermon—



For you and me to heart to take  
 (O dear beloved brother readers),  
 To-day—as when the good king spake  
 Beneath the solemn Syrian cedars.

It was just so with him always. He was “crying his sermon,” hoping, if it might be so, to do something towards lessening the evils he saw around him. We all preach our sermon, but not always with the same earnestness. He had become so urgent in the cause, so loud in his denunciations, that he did not stop often to speak of the good things around him. Now and again he paused and blessed amid, the torrent of his anathemas. There are Dobbin, and Esmond, and Colonel Newcome. But his anathemas are the loudest. It has been so, I think, nearly always with the eloquent preachers.

I will insert here—especially here at the end of this chapter, in which I have spoken of Thackeray's matter and manner of writing, because of the justice of the criticism conveyed—the lines which Lord Houghton wrote on his death, and which are to be found in the February number of *The Cornhill* of 1864. It was the first number printed after his death. I would add that, though no Dean applied for permission to bury Thackeray in Westminster Abbey, his bust was placed there without delay. What is needed by the nation in such a case is simply a lasting memorial there, where such memorials are most often seen and most highly honoured. But we can all of us sympathise with the feeling of the poet, writing immediately on the loss of such a friend :

When one, whose nervous English verse  
 Public and party hates defied,  
 Who bore and bandied many a curse  
 Of angry times—when Dryden died,

Our royal abbey's Bishop-Dean  
 Waited for no suggestive prayer,  
 But, ere one day closed o'er the scene,  
 Craved, as a boon, to lay him there.

The wayward faith, the faulty life,  
 Vanished before a nation's pain.  
 Panther and Hind forgot their strife,  
 And rival statesmen thronged the fane.

O gentle censor of our age!  
 Prime master of our ampler tongue!  
 Whose word of wit and generous page  
 Were never wrath, except with wrong,—

Fielding—without the manner's dross,  
 Scott—with a spirit's larger room,  
 What Prelate deems thy grave his loss?  
 What Halifax erects thy tomb?

But, may be, he—who so could draw  
 The hidden great—the humble wise,  
 Yielding with them to God's good law,  
 Makes the Pantheon where he lies.

THE END.

# ADDISON

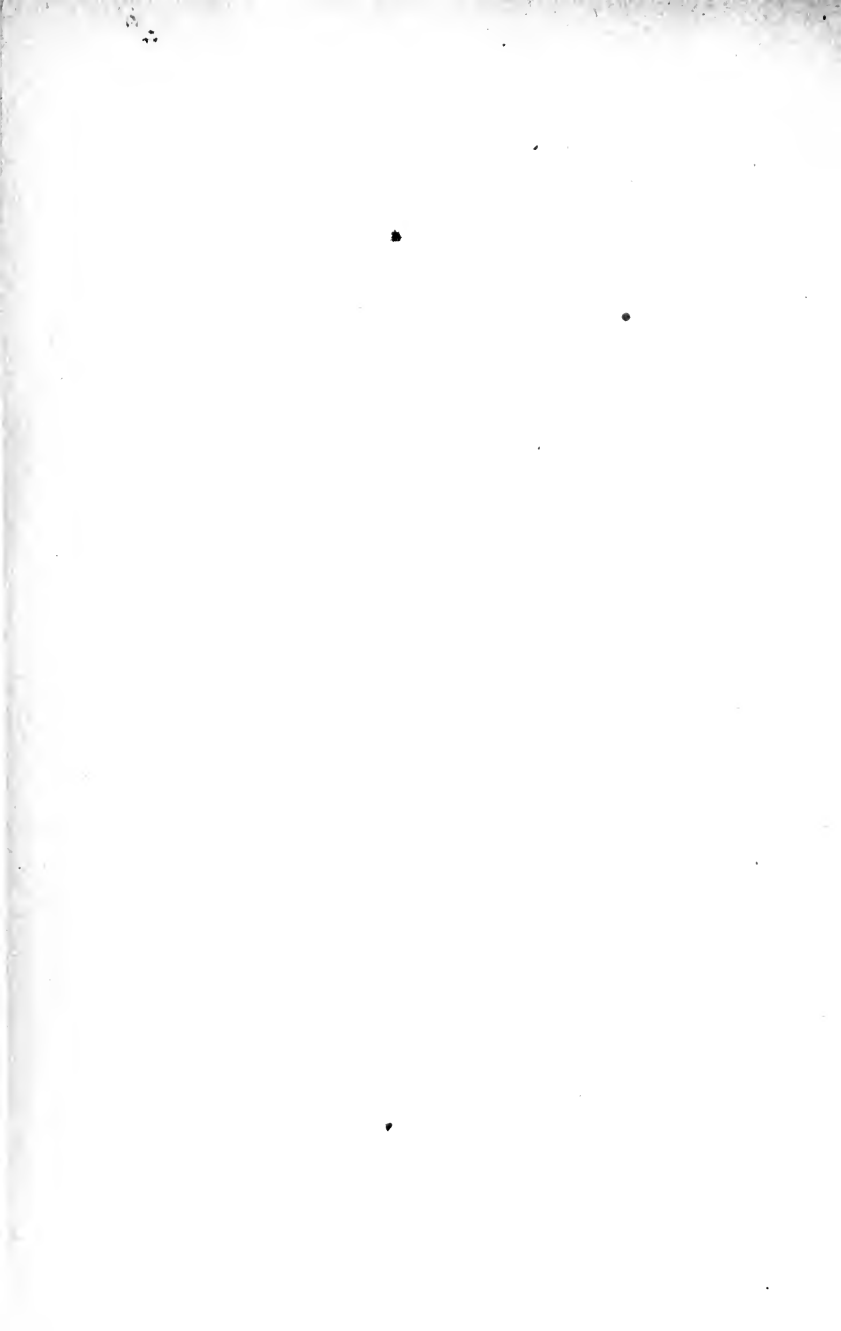
BY

W. J. COURTHOPE



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# ADDISON.

## CHAPTER I.

### THE STATE OF ENGLISH SOCIETY AND LETTERS AFTER THE RESTORATION.

OF the four English men of letters whose writings most fully embody the spirit of the eighteenth century, the one who provides the biographer with the scantiest materials is Addison. In his *Journal to Stella*, his social verses, and his letters to his friends, we have a vivid picture of those relations with women and that protracted suffering which invest with such tragic interest the history of Swift. Pope, by the publication of his own correspondence, has enabled us, in a way that he never intended, to understand the strange moral twist which distorted a nature by no means devoid of noble instincts. Johnson was fortunate in the companionship of perhaps the best biographer who ever lived. But of the real life and character of Addison scarcely any contemporary record remains. The formal narrative prefixed to his works by Tickell is, by that writer's own admission, little more than a bibliography. Steele, who might have told us more than any man about his boyhood and his manner of life in London, had become estranged from his old friend before his death. No writer

has taken the trouble to preserve any account of the wit and wisdom that enlivened the "little senate" at Button's. His own letters are, as a rule, compositions as finished as his papers in the *Spectator*. Those features in his character which excite the greatest interest have been delineated by the hand of an enemy—an enemy who possessed an unrivalled power of satirical portrait-painting, and was restrained by no regard for truth from creating in the public mind such impressions about others as might serve to heighten the favourable opinion of himself.

This absence of dramatic incident in Addison's life would lead us naturally to conclude that he was deficient in the energy and passion which cause a powerful nature to leave a mark upon its age. Yet such a judgment would certainly be erroneous. Shy and reserved as he was, the unanimous verdict of his most illustrious contemporaries is decisive as to the respect and admiration which he excited among them. The man who could exert so potent an influence over the mercurial Steele, who could fascinate the haughty and cynical intellect of Swift, whose conversation, by the admission of his satirist Pope, had in it something more charming than that of any other man; of whom it was said that he might have been chosen king if he wished it; such a man, though to the coarse perception of Mandeville he might have seemed no more than "a parson in a tye-wig," can hardly have been deficient in force of character.

Nor would it have been possible for a writer distinguished by mere elegance and refinement to leave a lasting impress on the literature and society of his country. In one generation after another, men representing opposing elements of rank, class, interest, and taste, have agreed in acknowledging Addison's extraordinary merits. "Who-

ever wishes," says Johnson—at the end of a biography strongly coloured with the prepossessions of a semi-Jacobite Tory—"whoever wishes to attain an English style, familiar but not coarse, and elegant but not ostentatious, must give his days and nights to the volumes of Addison." "Such a mark of national respect," says Macaulay, the best representative of middle-class opinion in the present century, speaking of the statue erected to Addison in Westminster Abbey, "was due to the unsullied statesman, to the accomplished scholar, to the master of pure English eloquence, to the consummate painter of life and manners. It was due, above all, to the great satirist who alone knew how to use ridicule without abusing it; who, without inflicting a wound, effected a great social reform, and who reconciled wit and virtue after a long and disastrous separation, during which wit had been led astray by profligacy, and virtue by fanaticism."

This verdict of a great critic is accepted by an age to which the grounds of it are, perhaps, not very apparent. The author of any ideal creation—a poem, a drama, or a novel—has an imprescriptible property in the fame of his work. But to harmonise conflicting social elements, to bring order out of chaos in the sphere of criticism, to form right ways of thinking about questions of morals, taste, and breeding, are operations of which the credit, though it is certainly to be ascribed to particular individuals, is generally absorbed by society itself. Macaulay's eulogy is as just as it is eloquent, but the pages of the *Spectator* alone will hardly show the reader why Addison should be so highly praised for having reconciled wit with virtue. Nor, looking at him as a critic, will it appear a great achievement to have pointed out to English society the beauties of *Paradise Lost*, unless it be remembered that

the taste of the preceding generation still influenced Addison's contemporaries, and that in that generation Cowley was accounted a greater poet than Milton.

To estimate Addison at his real value we must regard him as the chief architect of Public Opinion in the eighteenth century. But here again we are met by an initial difficulty, because it has become almost a commonplace of contemporary criticism to represent the eighteenth century as a period of sheer destruction. It is tacitly assumed by a school of distinguished philosophical writers that we have arrived at a stage in the world's history in which it is possible to take a positive and scientific view of human affairs. As it is of course necessary that from such a system all belief in the supernatural shall be jealously excluded, it has not seemed impossible to write the history of Thought itself in the eighteenth century. And in tracing the course of this supposed continuous stream it is natural that all the great English writers of the period should be described as in one way or another helping to pull down, or vainly to strengthen, the theological barriers erected by centuries of bigotry against the irresistible tide of enlightened progress.

It would be of course entirely out of place to discuss here the merits of this new school of history. Those who consider that, whatever glimpses we may obtain of the law and order of the universe, man is, as he always has been and always will be, a mystery to himself, will hardly allow that the operations of the human spirit can be traced in the dissecting-room. But it is, in any case, obvious that to treat the great *imaginative* writers of any age as if they were only mechanical agents in an evolution of thought is to do them grave injustice. Such writers are, above all things, creative. Their first aim is to "show the very age

and body of the time his form and pressure." No work of the eighteenth century, composed in a consciously destructive spirit, has taken its place among the acknowledged classics of the language. Even the *Tale of a Tub* is to be regarded as a satire upon the aberrations of theologians from right reason, not upon the principles of Christianity itself. The *Essay on Man* has, no doubt, logically a tendency towards Deism, but nobody ever read the poem for the sake of its philosophy; and it is well known that Pope was much alarmed when it was pointed out to him that his conclusions might be represented as incompatible with the doctrines of revealed religion.

The truth indeed seems to be the exact converse of what is alleged by the scientific historians. So far from the eighteenth century in England being an age of destructive analysis, its energies were chiefly devoted to political, social, and literary reconstruction. Whatever revolution in faith and manners the English nation had undergone had been the work of the two preceding centuries, and though the historic foundations of society remained untouched, the whole form of the superstructure had been profoundly modified.

"So tenacious are we," said Burke, towards the close of the last century, "of our old ecclesiastical modes and fashions of institution that very little change has been made in them since the fourteenth or fifteenth centuries, adhering in this particular as in all else to our old settled maxim never entirely nor at once to depart from antiquity. We found these institutions on the whole favourable to morality and discipline, and we thought they were susceptible of amendment without altering the ground. We thought they were capable of receiving and meliorating, and, above all, of preserving the accessories of science and literature as the order of Providence should successively produce them. And after all, with this Gothic and monkish education (for such it is the groundwork), we may put in our claim to as

ample and early a share in all the improvements in science, in arts, and in literature which have illuminated the modern world as any other nation in Europe. We think one main cause of this improvement was our not despising the patrimony of knowledge which was left us by our forefathers."

All this is, in substance, true of our political as well as our ecclesiastical institutions. And yet, when Burke wrote, the great feudal and mediæval structure of England had been so transformed by the Wars of the Roses, the Reformation, the Rebellion, and the Revolution, that its ancient outlines were barely visible. In so far, therefore, as his words seem to imply that the social evolution he describes was produced by an imperceptible and almost mechanical process of national instinct, the impression they tend to create is entirely erroneous.

If we have been hitherto saved from such corruption as undermined the republics of Italy, from the religious wars that so long enfeebled and divided Germany, and from the Revolution that has severed modern France from her ancient history, thanks for this are due partly, no doubt, to favouring conditions of nature and society, but quite as much to the genius of great individuals who prepared the mind of the nation for the gradual assimilation of new ideas. Thus Langland and Wycliffe and their numerous followers, long before the Reformation, had so familiarised the minds of the people with their ideas of the Christian religion that the Sovereign was able to assume the Headship of the Church without the shock of a social convulsion. Fresh feelings and instincts grew up in the hearts of whole classes of the nation without at first producing any change in outward habits of life, and even without arousing a sense of their logical incongruity. These mixed ideas were constantly brought before the imagination in

the works of the poets. Shakespeare abounds with passages in which, side by side with the old feudal, monarchical, catholic, and patriotic instincts of Englishmen, we find the sentiments of the Italian Renaissance. Spenser conveys Puritan doctrines sometimes by the mouth of shepherds, whose originals he had found in Theocritus and Virgil; sometimes under allegorical forms derived from books of chivalry and the ceremonial of the Catholic Church. Milton, the most rigidly Calvinistic of all the English poets in his opinions, is also the most severely classical in his style.

It was the task of Addison to carry on the reconciling traditions of our literature. It is his praise to have accomplished his task under conditions far more difficult than any that his predecessors had experienced. What they had done was to give instinctive and characteristic expression to the floating ideas of the society about them; what Addison and his contemporaries did was to found a public opinion by a conscious effort of reason and persuasion. Before the Civil Wars there had been at least no visible breach in the principle of Authority in Church and State. At the beginning of the eighteenth century constituted authority had been recently overthrown; one king had been beheaded, another had been expelled; the Episcopalian form of Church Government had been violently displaced in favour of the Presbyterian, and had been with almost equal violence restored. Whole classes of the population had been drawn into opposing camps during the Civil War, and still stood confronting each other with all the harsh antagonism of sentiment inherited from that conflict. Such a bare summary alone is sufficient to indicate the nature of the difficulties Addison had to encounter in his efforts to harmonise public opinion; but a

more detailed examination of the state of society after the Restoration is required to place in its full light the extraordinary merits of the success that he achieved.

There was, to begin with, a vehement opposition between town and country. In the country the old ideas of Feudalism, modified by circumstances, but vigorous and deep-rooted, still prevailed. True, the military system of land-tenure had disappeared with the Restoration, but it was not so with the relations of life, and the habits of thought and feeling which the system had created. The features of surviving Feudalism have been inimitably preserved for us in the character of Sir Roger de Coverley. Living in the patriarchal fashion, in the midst of tenants and retainers, who looked up to him as their chief, and for whose welfare and protection he considered himself responsible, the country gentleman valued above all things the principle of Loyalty. To the moneyed classes in the towns he was instinctively opposed; he regarded their interests, both social and commercial, as contrary to his own; he looked with dislike and suspicion on the economical principles of government and conduct on which these classes naturally rely. Even the younger sons of county families had in Addison's day abandoned the custom, common enough in the feudal times, of seeking their fortune in trade. Many a Will Wimble now spent his whole life in the country, training dogs for his neighbours, fishing their streams, making whips for their young heirs, and even garters for their wives and daughters.<sup>1</sup>

The country gentlemen were confirmed in these ideas by the difficulties of communication. During his visit to Sir Roger de Coverley the *Spectator* observed the extreme slowness with which fashions penetrated into the country;

<sup>1</sup> *Spectator*, No. 108.



and he noticed, too, that party spirit was much more violent there than in the towns. The learning of the clergy, many of whom resided with the country squires as chaplains, was of course enlisted on the Tory side, and supplied it with arguments which the body of the party might perhaps have found it difficult to discover, or at least to express, for themselves. For Tory tastes undoubtedly lay generally rather in the direction of sport than of books. Sir Roger seems to be as much above the average level of his class as Squire Western is certainly below it: perhaps the Tory fox-hunter of the *Freeholder*, though somewhat satirically painted, is a fair representative of the society which had its headquarters at the October Club, and whose favourite poet was Tom D'Urfey.

The commercial and professional classes, from whom the Whigs derived their chief support, of course predominated in the towns, and their larger opportunities of association gave them an influence in affairs which compensated for their inferiority in numbers. They lacked, however, what the country party possessed, a generous ideal of life. Though many of them were connected with the Presbyterian system, their common sense made them revolt from its rigidity, while at the same time their economical principles failed to supply them with any standard that could satisfy the imagination. Sir Andrew Freeport excites in us less interest than any member of the Spectator's Club. There was not yet constituted among the upper middle classes that mixed conception of good feeling, good breeding, and good taste which we now attach to the name of "gentleman."

Two main currents of opinion divided the country, to one of which a man was obliged to surrender himself if he wished to enjoy the pleasures of organised society. One

of these was Puritanism, but this was undoubtedly the less popular, or at least the less fashionable. A protracted experience of Roundhead tyranny under the Long Parliament had inclined the nation to believe that almost any form of Government was preferable to that of the Saints. The Puritan, no longer the mere sectarian, as in the days of Elizabeth and James I., somewhat ridiculous in the extravagance of his opinions, but respectable from the constancy with which he maintained them, had ruled over them as a taskmaster, and had forced them, as far as he could by military violence, to practise the asceticism to which monks and nuns had voluntarily submitted themselves. The most innocent as well as the most brutal diversions of the people were sacrificed to his spiritual pride. As Macaulay well says, he hated bear-baiting, not because it gave pain to the bear, but because it gave pleasure to the spectator. The tendency of his creed was, in fact, anti-social. Beauty in his eyes was a snare, and pleasure a sin; the only mode of social intercourse which he approved was a sermon.

On the other hand, the habits of the Court, which gave the tone to all polite society, were almost equally distasteful to the instincts of the people. It was inevitable that the inclinations of Charles II. should be violently opposed to every sentiment of the Puritans. While he was in the power of the Scots he had been forced into feigned compliance with Presbyterian rites; the Puritans had put his father to death, and had condemned himself to many years of exile and hardship in Catholic countries. He had returned to his own land half French in his political and religious sympathies, and entirely so in his literary tastes. To convert and to corrupt those of his subjects who immediately surrounded him was an easy matter. "All by the king's example lived and loved." Poets, painters, and

actors were forward to promote principles viewed with favour by their sovereign and not at all disagreeable to themselves. An ingenious philosopher elevated Absolutism into an intellectual and moral system, the consequence of which was to encourage the powerful in the indulgence of every selfish instinct. As the Puritans had oppressed the country with a system of inhuman religion and transcendental morality, so now, in order to get as far from Puritanism as possible, it seemed necessary for every one aspiring to be thought a gentleman to avow himself an atheist or a debauchee.

The ideas of the man in the mode after the Restoration are excellently hit off in one of the fictitious letters in the *Spectator* :

“I am now between fifty and sixty, and had the honour to be well with the first men of taste and gallantry in the joyous reign of Charles the Second. As for yourself, Mr. Spectator, you seem with the utmost arrogance to undermine the very fundamentals upon which we conducted ourselves. It is monstrous to set up for a man of wit and yet deny that honour in a woman is anything but peevishness, that inclination is not the best rule of life, or virtue and vice anything else but health and disease. We had no more to do but to put a lady in a good humour, and all we could wish followed of course. Then, again, your Tully and your discourses of another life are the very bane of mirth and good humour. Prythee, don't value thyself on thy reason at that exorbitant rate and the dignity of human nature; take my word for it, a setting dog has as good reason as any man in England.”<sup>1</sup>

While opinions, which from different sides struck at the very roots of society, prevailed both in the fashionable and religious portions of the community, it was inevitable that Taste should be hopelessly corrupt. All the artistic and literary forms which the Court favoured were of the ro-

mantic order, but it was romance from which beauty and vitality had utterly disappeared. Of the two great principles of ancient chivalry, Love and Honour, the last notes of which are heard in the lyrics of Lovelace and Montrose, one was now held to be non-existent, and the other was utterly perverted. The feudal spirit had surrounded woman with an atmosphere of mystical devotion, but in the reign of Charles II. the passion of love was subjected to the torturing treatment then known as "wit." Cowley and Waller seem to think that when a man is in love the energy of his feelings is best shown by discovering resemblances between his mistress and those objects in nature to which she is apparently most unlike.

The ideal of Woman, as she is represented in the *Spectator*, adding grace, charity, and refinement to domestic life, had still to be created. The king himself, the presumed mirror of good taste, was notoriously under the control of his numerous mistresses; and the highest notion of love which he could conceive was gallantry. French romances were therefore generally in vogue. All the casuistry of love which had been elaborated by Mademoiselle de Scudery was reproduced with improvements by Mrs. Aphra Behn. At the same time, as usually happens in diseased societies, there was a general longing to cultivate the simplicity of the Golden Age, and the consequence was that no person, even in the lower grades of society, who pretended to any reading, ever thought of making love in his own person. The proper tone of feeling was not acquired till he had invested himself with the pastoral attributes of Damon and Celadon, and had addressed his future wife as Amarantha or Phyllis.

The tragedies of the period illustrate this general inclination to spurious romance. If ever there was a time

when the ideal of monarchy was degraded, and the instincts of chivalrous action discouraged, it was in the reign of Charles II. Absorbed as he was in the pursuit of pleasure, the king scarcely attempted to conceal his weariness when obliged to attend to affairs of State. He allowed the Dutch fleet to approach his capital and to burn his own ships of war on the Thames; he sold Dunkirk to the French; hardly any action in his life evinces any sense of patriotism or honour. And yet we have only to glance at Johnson's *Life of Dryden* to see how all the tragedies of the time turn on the great characters, the great actions, the great sufferings of princes. The Elizabethan drama had exhibited man in every degree of life and with every variety of character; the playwright of the Restoration seldom descended below such themes as the conquest of Mexico or Granada, the fortunes of the Great Mogul, and the fate of Hannibal. This monotony of subject was doubtless in part the result of policy, for in pitying the fortunes of Montezuma the imagination of the spectator insensibly recalled those of Charles the Second.

Everything in these tragedies is unreal, strained, and affected. In order to remove them as far as possible from the language of ordinary life they are written in rhyme, while the astonishment of the audience is raised with big swelling words, which vainly seek to hide the absence of genuine feeling. The heroes tear their passion to tatters because they think it heroic to do so; their flights into the sublime generally drop into the ridiculous; instead of holding up the mirror to nature, their object is to depart as far as possible from common sense. Nothing exhibits more characteristically the utterly artificial feeling, both of the dramatists and the spectators, than the habit which then prevailed of dismissing the audience after a

tragic play with a witty epilogue. On one occasion, Nell Gwynne, in the character of St. Catherine, was, at the end of the play, left for dead upon the stage. Her body having to be removed, the actress suddenly started to her feet, exclaiming,

“Hold! are you mad? you damned confounded dog,  
I am to rise and speak the epilogue!”<sup>1</sup>

By way of compensation, however, the writers of the period poured forth their real feelings without reserve in their comedies. So great, indeed, is the gulf that separates our own manners from theirs, that some critics have endeavoured to defend the comic dramatists of the Restoration against the moralists on the ground that their representations of Nature are entirely devoid of reality. Charles Lamb, who loved all curiosities, and the Caroline comedians among the number, says of them :

“They are a world of themselves almost as much as fairy-land. Take one of their characters, male or female (with few exceptions they are alike), and place it in a modern play, and my virtuous indignation shall rise against the profligate wretch as warmly as the Catos of the pit could desire, because in a modern play I am to judge of the right and the wrong. The standard of *police* is the measure of *political justice*. The atmosphere will blight it; it cannot live here. It has got into a moral world, where it has no business, from which it must needs fall headlong—as dizzy and incapable of making a stand as a Swedenborgian bad spirit that has wandered unawares into his sphere of Good Men or Angels. But in its own world do we feel the creature is so very bad? The Fainalls and Mirabels, the Dorimants and Lady Touchwoods, in their own sphere do not offend my moral sense; in fact, they do not appeal to it at all. They seem engaged in their proper element. They break through no laws or conscientious restraints. They know of none. They have got out of Christendom into the land of—what shall I call it?—of cuckoldry—

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<sup>1</sup> *Spectator*, No. 341.

the Utopia of gallantry, where pleasure is duty and the manners perfect freedom. It is altogether a speculative scene of things, which has no reference whatever to the world that is."

This is a very happy description of the manner in which the plays of Etherege, Shadwell, Wycherley, and Congreve affect us to-day; and it is no doubt superfluous to expend much moral indignation on works which have long since lost their power to charm: comedies in which the reader finds neither the horseplay of Aristophanes, nor the nature of Terence, nor the poetry of Shakespeare; in which there is not a single character that arouses interest, or a situation that spontaneously provokes laughter; in which the complications of plot are produced by the devices of fine gentlemen for making cuckolds of citizens, and the artifices of wives to dupe their husbands; in which the profuse wit of the dialogue might excite admiration, if it were possible to feel the smallest interest in the occasion that produced it. But to argue that these plays never represented any state of existing society is a paradox which chooses to leave out of account the contemporary attack on the stage made by Jeremy Collier, the admissions of Dryden, and all those valuable glimpses into the manners of our ancestors which are afforded by the prologues of the period.

It is sufficient to quote against Lamb the witty and severe criticism of Steele in the *Spectator*, upon Etherege's *Man of the Mode*:

"It cannot be denied but that the negligence of everything which engages the attention of the sober and valuable part of mankind appears very well drawn in this piece. But it is denied that it is necessary to the character of a fine gentleman that he should in that manner trample upon all order and decency. As for the character of Dorimant, it is more of a coxcomb than that of Fopling. He says of one of his companions that a good correspondence between them

is their mutual interest. Speaking of that friend, he declares their being much together 'makes the women think the better of his understanding, and judge more favourably of my reputation. It makes him pass upon some for a man of very good sense, and me upon others for a very civil person.' This whole celebrated piece is a perfect contradiction to good manners, good sense, and common honesty; and as there is nothing in it but what is built upon the ruin of virtue and innocence, according to the notion of virtue in this comedy, I take the shoemaker to be in reality the fine gentleman of the play; for it seems he is an atheist, if we may depend upon his character as given by the orange-woman, who is herself far from being the lowest in the play. She says of a fine man who is Dorimant's companion, 'there is not such another heathen in the town except the shoemaker.' His pretension to be the hero of the drama appears still more in his own description of his way of living with his lady. 'There is,' says he, 'never a man in the town lives more like a gentleman with his wife than I do. I never mind her motions; she never inquires into mine. We speak to one another civilly; hate one another heartily; and, because it is vulgar to lie and soak together, we have each of us our several settle-beds.'

"That of 'soaking together' is as good as if Dorimant had spoken it himself; and I think, since he puts human nature in as ugly a form as the circumstances will bear, and is a staunch unbeliever, he is very much wronged in having no part of the good fortune bestowed in the last act. To speak plain of this whole work, I think nothing but being lost to a sense of innocence and virtue can make any one see this comedy without observing more frequent occasion to move sorrow and indignation than mirth and laughter. At the same time I allow it to be nature, but it is nature in its utmost corruption and degeneracy."<sup>1</sup>

The truth is, that the stage after the Restoration reflects only too faithfully the manners and the sentiments of the only society which at that period could boast of anything like organisation. The press, which now enables public opinion to exercise so powerful a control over the manners of the times, had then scarcely an existence. No standard

<sup>1</sup> *Spectator*, No. 65.



of female honour restrained the license of wit and debauchery. If the clergy were shocked at the propagation of ideas so contrary to the whole spirit of Christianity, their natural impulse to reprove them was checked by the fear that an apparent condemnation of the practices of the Court might end in the triumph of their old enemies, the Puritans. All the elements of an old and decaying form of society that tended to atheism, cynicism, and dissolute living, exhibited themselves, therefore, in naked shamelessness on the stage. The audiences in the theatres were equally devoid of good manners and good taste; they did not hesitate to interrupt the actors in the midst of a serious play, while they loudly applauded their obscene allusions. So gross was the character of comic dialogue that women could not venture to appear at a comedy without masks, and under these circumstances the theatre became the natural centre for assignations. In such an atmosphere women readily cast off all modesty and reserve; indeed, the choicest indecencies of the times are to be found in the epilogues to the plays, which were always assigned to the female actors.

It at first sight seems remarkable that a society inveterately corrupt should have contained in itself such powers of purification and vitality as to discard the literary garbage of the Restoration period in favour of the refined sobriety which characterises the writers of Queen Anne's reign. But, in fact, the spread of the infection was confined within certain well-marked limits. The Court moved in a sphere apart, and was altogether too light and frivolous to exert a decided moral influence on the great body of the nation. The country gentlemen, busied on their estates, came seldom to town; the citizens, the lawyers, and the members of the other professions steadily avoided the theatre, and regarded with equal contempt the moral and lit-

erary excesses of the courtiers. Among this class, unrepresented at present in the world of letters, except, perhaps, by antiquarians like Selden, the foundations of sound taste were being silently laid. The readers of the nation had hitherto been almost limited to the nobility. Books were generally published by subscription, and were dependent for their success on the favour with which they were received by the courtiers. But, after the subsidence of the Civil War, the nation began to make rapid strides in wealth and refinement, and the moneyed classes sought for intellectual amusement in their leisure hours. Authors by degrees found that they might look for readers beyond the select circle of their aristocratic patrons; and the book-seller, who had hitherto calculated his profits merely by the commission he might obtain on the sale of books, soon perceived that they were becoming valuable as property. The reign of Charles II. is remarkable not only for the great increase in the number of the licensed printers in London, but for the appearance of the first of the race of modern publishers, Jacob Tonson.

The portion of society whose tastes the publishers undertook to satisfy was chiefly interested in history, poetry, and criticism. It was this for which Dryden composed his *Miscellany*, this to which he addressed the admirable critical essays which precede his *Translations from the Latin Poets* and his *Versifications of Chaucer*, and this which afterwards gave the main support to the *Tatler* and the *Spectator*. Ignorant of the writings of the great classical authors, as well as of the usages of polite society, these men were nevertheless robust and manly in their ideas, and were eager to form for themselves a correct standard of taste by reference to the best authorities. Though they turned with repugnance from the playhouse and from the

morals of the Court, they could not avoid being insensibly affected by the tone of grace and elegance which prevailed in Court circles. And in this respect, if in no other, our gratitude is due to the Caroline dramatists, who may justly claim to be the founders of the *social* prose style in English literature. Before them English prose had been employed, no doubt, with music and majesty by many writers; but the style of these is scarcely representative; they had used the language for their own elevated purposes, without, however, attempting to give it that balanced fineness and subtlety which makes it a fitting instrument for conveying the complex ideas of an advanced stage of society. Dryden, Wycherley, and their followers, impelled by the taste of the Court to study the French language, brought to English composition a nicer standard of logic and a more choice selection of language, while the necessity of pleasing their audiences with brilliant dialogue made them careful to give their sentences that well-poised structure which Addison afterwards carried to perfection in the *Spectator*.

By this brief sketch the reader may be enabled to judge of the distracted state of society, both in politics and taste, in the reign of Charles II. On the one side, the Monarchical element in the Constitution was represented by the Court Party, flushed with the recent restoration; retaining the old ideas and principles of absolutism which had prevailed under James I., without being able to perceive their inapplicability to the existing nature of things; feeding its imagination alternately on sentiments derived from the decayed spirit of chivalry, and on artistic representations of fashionable debauchery in its most open form—a party which, while it fortunately preserved the traditions of wit, elegance, and gaiety of style, seemed unaware that these qualities could be put to any other use than the

mitigation of an intolerable *ennui*. On the other side, the rising power of Democracy found its representatives in austere Republicans opposed to all institutions in Church and State that seemed to obstruct their own abstract principles of government; gloomy fanatics, who, with an intense intellectual appreciation of eternal principles of religion and morality, sought to sacrifice to their system the most permanent and even innocent instincts of human nature. Between the two extreme parties was the unorganised body of the nation, grouped round old customs and institutions, rapidly growing in wealth and numbers, conscious of the rise in their midst of new social principles, but perplexed how to reconcile these with time-honoured methods of religious, political, and literary thought. To lay the foundations of sound opinion among the people at large; to prove that reconciliation was possible between principles hitherto exhibited only in mutual antagonism; to show that under the English Constitution monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy might all be harmonised, that humanity was not absolutely incompatible with religion or morality with art, was the task of the statesmen, and still more of the men of letters, of the early part of the eighteenth century.

## CHAPTER II.

### ADDISON'S FAMILY AND EDUCATION.

JOSEPH ADDISON was born on the 1st of May, 1672. He was the eldest son of Lancelot Addison, at the time of his birth rector of Milston, near Amesbury, in Wiltshire, and afterwards Dean of Lichfield. His father was a man of character and accomplishments. Educated at Oxford, while that University was under the control of the famous Puritan Visitation, he made no secret of his contempt for principles to which he was forced to submit, or of his preferences for Monarchy and Episcopacy. His boldness was not agreeable to the University authorities, and being forced to leave Oxford, he maintained himself for a time near Petworth, in Sussex, by acting as chaplain or tutor in families attached to the Royalist cause. After the Restoration he obtained the appointment of chaplain to the garrison of Dunkirk, and when that town was ceded to France in 1662, he was removed in a similar capacity to Tangier. Here he remained eight years, but, venturing on a visit to England, his post was bestowed upon another, and he would have been left without resources had not one of his friends presented him with the living of Milston, valued at £120 a year. With the courage of his order he thereupon took a wife, Jane, daughter of Dr. Nathaniel Gulston, and sister of William Gulston, Bishop of Bristol,

by whom he had six children, three sons and three daughters, all born at Milston. In 1675 he was made a prebendary of Salisbury Cathedral and Chaplain-in-Ordinary to the King; and in 1683 he was promoted to the Deanery of Lichfield, as a reward for his services at Tangier, and out of consideration of losses which he had sustained by a fire at Milston. His literary reputation stood high, and it is said that he would have been made a bishop, if his old zeal for legitimacy had not prompted him to manifest in the Convocation of 1689 his hostility to the Revolution. He died in 1703.

Lancelot was a writer at once voluminous and lively. In the latter part of his life he produced several treatises on theological subjects, the most popular of which was called *An Introduction to the Sacrament*. This book passed through many editions. The doctrine it contains leans rather to the Low Church side. But much the most characteristic of his writings were his works on Mahomedanism and Judaism, the results of his studies during his residence in Barbary. These show not only considerable industry and research and powers of shrewd observation, but that genuine literary faculty which enables a writer to leave upon a subject of a general nature the impression of his own character. While there is nothing forced or exaggerated in his historical style, a vein of allegory runs through the narrative of the *Revolutions of the Kingdoms of Fez and Morocco*, which must have had a piquant flavour for the orthodox English reader of that day. Recollections of the Protectorate would have taken nothing of its vividness from the portrait of the Moorish priest who "began to grow into reputation with the people by reason of his high pretensions to piety and fervent zeal for their law, illustrated by a stubborn rigidity of conversation

and outward sanctity of life." When the Zeriffe, with ambitious designs on the throne, sent his sons on a pilgrimage to Mecca, the religious buffooneries practised by the young men must have recalled to the reader circumstances more recent and personal than those which the author was apparently describing. "Much was the reverence and reputation of holiness which they thereby acquired among the superstitious people, who could hardly be kept from kissing their garments and adoring them as saints, while they failed not in their parts, but acted as much devotion as high contemplative looks, deep sighs, tragical gestures, and other passionate interjections of holiness could express. 'Allah, allah!' was their doleful note, their sustenance the people's alms." And when these impostors had inveigled the King of Fez into a religious war, the description of those who "mistrusted their own safety, and began, but too late, to repent their approving of an armed hypocrisy," was not more applicable to the rulers of Barbary than to the people of England. "Puffed up with their successes, they forgot their obedience, and these saints denied the king the fifth part of their spoils. . . . By which it appeared that they took up arms, not out of love for their country and zeal for their religion, but out of desire of rule." There is, indeed, nothing in these utterances which need have prevented the writer from consistently promoting the Revolution of 1688; yet his principles seem to have carried him far in the opposite direction; and it is interesting to remember that the assertor in Convocation of the doctrine of indefeasible hereditary right was the father of the author of the *Whig Examiner* and the *Freeholder*. However decidedly Joseph may have dissented from his father's political creed, we know that he entertained admiration and respect for his memory, and that

death alone prevented him from completing the monument afterwards erected in Lancelot's honour in Lichfield Cathedral.

Of Addison's mother nothing of importance is recorded. His second brother, Gulston, became Governor of Fort St. George, in the East Indies; and the third, Lancelot, followed in Joseph's footsteps so far as to obtain a Fellowship at Magdalen College, Oxford. His sisters, Jane and Anna, died young; but Dorothy was twice married, and Swift records in her honour that she was "a kind of wit, and very like her brother." We may readily believe that a writer so lively as Lancelot would have had clever children, but Steele was perhaps carried away by the zeal of friendship or the love of epigram when he said, in his dedication to the *Drummer*: "Mr. Dean Addison left behind him four children, each of whom, for excellent talents and singular perfections, was as much above the ordinary world as their brother Joseph was above them." But that Steele had a sincere admiration for the whole family is sufficiently shown by his using them as an example in one of his early *Tatlers*:

"I remember among all my acquaintance but one man whom I have thought to live with his children with equanimity and a good grace. He had three sons and one daughter, whom he bred with all the care imaginable in a liberal and ingenuous way. I have often heard him say he had the weakness to love one much better than the other, but that he took as much pains to correct that as any other criminal passion that could arise in his mind. His method was to make it the only pretension in his children to his favour to be kind to each other, and he would tell them that he who was the best brother he would reckon the best son. This turned their thoughts into an emulation for the superiority in kind and tender affection towards each other. The boys behaved themselves very early with a manly friendship; and their sister, instead of the gross familiarities and



impertinent freedoms in behaviour usual in other houses, was always treated by them with as much complaisance as any other young lady of their acquaintance. It was an unspeakable pleasure to visit or sit at a meal in that family. I have often seen the old man's heart flow at his eyes with joy upon occasions which would appear indifferent to such as were strangers to the turn of his mind; but a very slight accident, wherein he saw his children's good-will to one another, created in him the god-like pleasure of loving them because they loved each other. This great command of himself in hiding his first impulse to partiality at last improved to a steady justice towards them, and that which at first was but an expedient to correct his weakness was afterwards the measure of his virtue."<sup>1</sup>

This, no doubt, is the set description of a moralist, and to an age in which the liberty of manners has grown into something like license it may savour of formalism and priggishness; but when we remember that the writer was one of the most warm-hearted of men, and that the subject of his panegyric was himself, full of vivacity and impulse, it must be admitted that the picture which it gives us of the Addison family in the rectory of Milston is a particularly amiable one.

Though the eighteenth century had little of that feeling for natural beauty which distinguishes our own, a man of Addison's imagination could hardly fail to be impressed by the character of the scenery in which his childhood was passed. No one who has travelled on a summer's day across Salisbury plain, with its vast canopy of sky and its open tracts of undulating downland, relieved by no shadows except such as are thrown by the passing cloud, the grazing sheep, and the great circle of Stonehenge, will forget the delightful sense of refreshment and repose produced by the descent into the valley of the Avon. The sounds of human life rising from the villages after the

<sup>1</sup> *Tatler*, No. 25.

long solitude of the plain, the shade of the deep woods, the coolness of the river, like all streams rising in the chalk, clear and peaceful, are equally delicious to the sense and the imagination. It was, doubtless, the recollection of these scenes that inspired Addison in his paraphrase of the twenty-third Psalm :

“The Lord my pasture shall prepare,  
And feed me with a shepherd’s care.

When in the sultry glebe I faint,  
Or on the thirsty mountain pant,  
To fertile vales and dewy meads  
My weary wandering steps he leads,  
Where peaceful rivers, soft and slow,  
Amid the verdant landscape flow.”

At Amesbury he was first sent to school, his master being one Nash ; and here, too, he probably met with the first recorded adventure of his life. It is said that having committed some fault, and being fearful of the consequences, he ran away from school, and, taking up his abode in a hollow tree, maintained himself as he could till he was discovered and brought back to his parents. He was removed from Amesbury to Salisbury, and thence to the Grammar School at Lichfield, where he is said to have been the leader in a “barring out.” From Lichfield he passed to the Charter House, then under the charge of Dr. Ellis, a man of taste and scholarship. The Charter House at that period was, after Westminster, the best-known school in England, and here was laid the foundation of that sound classical taste which perfected the style of the essays in the *Spectator*.

Macaulay labours with much force and ingenuity to prove that Addison’s classical acquirements were only

superficial, and, in his usual epigrammatic manner, hazards the opinion that "his knowledge of Greek, though doubtless such as was, in his time, thought respectable at Oxford, was evidently less than that which many lads now carry away every year from Eton and Rugby." That Addison was not a scholar of the class of Bentley or Porson may be readily admitted. But many scattered allusions in his works prove that his acquaintance with the Greek poets of every period, if cursory, was wide and intelligent: he was sufficiently master of the language thoroughly to understand the spirit of what he read; he undertook while at Oxford a translation of Herodotus, and one of the papers in the *Spectator* is a direct imitation of a *jeu d'esprit* of Lucian's. The Eton or Rugby boy who, in these days, with a normal appetite for cricket and football, acquired an equal knowledge of Greek literature, would certainly be somewhat of a prodigy.

No doubt, however, Addison's knowledge of the Latin poets was, as Macaulay infers, far more extensive and profound. It would have been strange had it been otherwise. The influence of the classical side of the Italian Renaissance was now at its height, and wherever those ideas became paramount Latin composition was held in at least as much esteem as poetry in the vernacular. Especially was this the case in England, where certain affinities of character and temperament made it easy for writers to adopt Roman habits of thought. Latin verse composition soon took firm root in the public schools and universities, so that clever boys of the period were tolerably familiar with most of the minor Roman poets. Pope, in the Fourth Book of the *Dunciad*, vehemently attacked the tradition as confining the mind to the study of words rather than of things; but he had himself had no experience of a public school, and

only those who fail to appreciate the influence of Latin verse composition on the style of our own greatest orators, and of poets like Milton and Gray, will be inclined to undervalue it as an instrument of social and literary training.

Proficiency in this art may at least be said to have laid the foundation of Addison's fortunes. Leaving the Charter House in 1687, at the early age of fifteen, he was entered at Queen's College, Oxford, and remained a member of that society for two years, when a copy of his Latin verses fell into the hands of Dr. Lancaster, then Fellow and afterwards Provost of the College. Struck with their excellence, Lancaster used his influence to obtain for him a demyship at Magdalen. The subject of this fortunate set of verses was "Inauguratio Regis Gulielmi," from which fact we may reasonably infer that even in his boyhood his mind had acquired a Whig bias. Whatever inclination he may have had in this direction would have been confirmed by the associations of his new college. The fluctuations of opinion in Magdalen had been frequent and extraordinary. Towards the close of Elizabeth's reign it was notorious for its Calvinism, but under the Chancellorship of Laud it appears to have adopted, with equal ardour, the cause of Arminianism, for it was among the colleges that offered the stoutest opposition to the Puritan visitors in 1647-48. The despotic tendencies of James II., however, again cooled its loyalty, and its spirited resistance to the king's order for the election of a Roman Catholic President had given a mortal blow to the Stuart dynasty. Hough was now President, but in consequence of the dispute with the king there had been no election of demies in 1688, so that twice the usual number was chosen in the following year, and the occasion was distinguished by the name of the "golden election." From Magdalen Addison proceed-

ed to his master's degree in 1693; the College elected him probationary Fellow in 1697, and actual Fellow the year after. He retained his Fellowship till 1711.

Of his tastes, habits, and friendships at Oxford there are few records. Among his acquaintance were Boulter, afterwards Archbishop of Dublin—whose memory is unenviably perpetuated, in company with Ambrose Phillips, in Pope's *Epistle to Arbuthnot*,

“Does not one table Bavius still admit,  
Still to one Bishop Phillips seem a wit?”—

and possibly the famous Sacheverell.<sup>1</sup> He is said to have shown in the society of Magdalen some of the shyness that afterwards distinguished him; he kept late hours, and read chiefly after dinner. The walk under the well-known elms by the Cherwell is still connected with his name. Though he probably acted as tutor in the college, the greater part of his quiet life at the University was doubtless occupied in study. A proof of his early maturity is seen in the fact that, in his nineteenth year, a young man of birth and fortune, Mr. Rushout, who was being educated at Magdalen, was placed under his charge.

His reputation as a scholar and a man of taste soon extended itself to the world of letters in London. In 1693, being then in his twenty-second year, he wrote his *Account of the Greatest English Poets*; and about the same time he addressed a short copy of verses to Dryden, compli-

<sup>1</sup> A note in the edition of Johnson's *Lives of the Poets*, published in 1801, states, on the authority of a “Lady in Wiltshire,” who derived her information from a Mr. Stephens, a Fellow of Magdalen and a contemporary of Addison's, that the Henry Sacheverell to whom Addison dedicated his *Account of the Greatest English Poets* was not the well-known divine, but a personal friend of Addison's, who died young, having written a *History of the Isle of Man*.

menting him on the enduring vigour of his poetical faculty, as shown in his translations of Virgil and other Latin poets, some of which had recently appeared in Tonson's *Miscellany*. The old poet appears to have been highly gratified, and to have welcomed the advances thus made to him, for he returned Addison's compliment by bestowing high and not unmerited praise on the translation of the Fourth Book of the *Georgics*, which the latter soon after undertook, and by printing, as a preface to his own translation, a discourse written by Addison on the *Georgics*, as well as arguments to most of the books of the *Æneid*.

Through Dryden, no doubt, he became acquainted with Jacob Tonson. The father of English publishing had for some time been a well-known figure in the literary world. He had purchased the copyright of *Paradise Lost*; he had associated himself with Dryden in publishing before the Revolution two volumes of *Miscellanies*; encouraged by the success which these obtained, he put the poet, in 1693, on some translations of Juvenal and Persius, and two new volumes of *Miscellanies*; while in 1697 he urged him to undertake a translation of the whole of the works of Virgil. Observing how strongly the public taste set towards the great classical writers, he was anxious to employ men of ability in the work of turning them into English; and it appears from existing correspondence that he engaged Addison, while the latter was at Oxford, to superintend a translation of Herodotus. He also suggested a translation of Ovid. Addison undertook to procure coadjutors for the work of translating the Greek historian. He himself actually translated the books called *Polymnia* and *Urania*, but for some unexplained reason the work was never published. For Ovid he seems, on the whole, to have had less inclination. At Tonson's instance he trans-

lated the Second Book of the *Metamorphoses*, which was first printed in the volume of *Miscellanies* that appeared in 1697; but he wrote to the publisher that "Ovid had so many silly stories with his good ones that he was more tedious to translate than a better poet would be." His study of Ovid, however, was of the greatest use in developing his critical faculty; the excesses and want of judgment in that poet forced him to reflect, and his observations on the style of his author anticipate his excellent remarks on the difference between True and False Wit in the sixty-second number of the *Spectator*.

Whoever, indeed, compares these notes with the *Essay on the Georgics*, and with the opinions expressed in the *Account of the English Poets*, will be convinced that the foundations of his critical method were laid at this period (1697). In the *Essay on the Georgics* he seems to be timid in the presence of Virgil's superiority; his *Account of the English Poets*, besides being impregnated with the principles of taste prevalent after the Restoration, shows deficient powers of perception and appreciation. The name of Shakespeare is not mentioned in it, Dryden and Congreve alone being selected to represent the drama. Chaucer is described as "a merry bard," whose humour has become obsolete through time and change; while the rich pictorial fancy of the *Faery Queen* is thus described:

"Old Spenser next, warmed with poetic rage,  
In ancient tales amused a barbarous age—  
An age that yet uncultivate and rude,  
Where'er the poet's fancy led pursued,  
Through pathless fields and unfrequented floods,  
To dens of dragons and enchanted woods.  
But now the mystic tale, that pleased of yore,  
Can charm an understanding age no more;

The long-spun allegories fulsome grow,  
While the dull moral lies too plain below."

According to Pope—always a suspicious witness where Addison is concerned—he had not read Spenser when he wrote this criticism on him.<sup>1</sup>

Milton, as a legitimate successor of the classics, is of course appreciated, but not at all after the elaborate fashion of the *Spectator*; to Dryden, the most distinguished poet of the day, deserved compliments are paid, but their value is lessened by the exaggerated opinion which the writer entertains of Cowley, who is described as a "mighty genius," and is praised for the inexhaustible riches of his imagination. Throughout the poem, in fact, we observe a remarkable confusion of various veins of thought; an unjust depreciation of the Gothic grandeur of the older English poets; a just admiration for the Greek and Roman authors; a sense of the necessity of good sense and regularity in writings composed for an "understanding age;" and at the same time a lingering taste for the forced invention and far-fetched conceits that mark the decay of the spirit of mediæval chivalry.

With the judgments expressed in this performance it is instructive to compare such criticisms on Shakespeare as we find in No. 42 of the *Spectator*, the papers on "Chevy Chase" (73, 74), and particularly the following passage:

"As true wit consists in the resemblance of ideas, and false wit in the resemblance of words, according to the foregoing instances, there is another kind of wit which consists partly in the resemblance of ideas and partly in the resemblance of words, which, for distinction's sake, I shall call mixed wit. This kind of wit is that which abounds in Cowley more than in any author that ever wrote. Mr.

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<sup>1</sup> *Spence's Anecdotes*, p. 50.



Waller has likewise a great deal of it. Mr. Dryden is very sparing in it. Milton has a genius much above it. *Spenser is in the same class with Milton.* The Italians even in their epic poetry are full of it. Monsieur Boileau, who formed himself upon the ancient poets, has everywhere rejected it with scorn. If we look after mixed wit among the Greeks, we shall find it nowhere but in the epigrammatists. There are, indeed, some strokes of it in the little poem ascribed to Musæus, which by that, as well as many other marks, betrays itself to be a modern composition. If we look into the Latin writers we find none of this mixed wit in Virgil, Lucretius, or Catullus; very little in Horace, but a great deal of it in Ovid, and scarce anything else in Martial."

The stepping-stone from the immaturity of the early criticisms in the *Account of the Greatest English Poets* to the finished case of the *Spectator* is to be found in the notes to the translation of Ovid.<sup>1</sup>

The time came when he was obliged to form a decision affecting the entire course of his life. Tonson, who had a wide acquaintance, no doubt introduced him to Congreve and the leading men of letters in London, and through them he was presented to Somers and Montague. Those ministers perhaps persuaded him, as a point of etiquette, to write, in 1695, his *Address to King William*, a poem composed in a vein of orthodox hyperbole, all of which must have been completely thrown away on that most unpoetical of monarchs. Yet in spite of those seductions Addison lingered at Oxford. To retain his Fellowship it was necessary for him to take orders. Had he done so, there can be no doubt that his literary skill and his value as a political partizan would have opened for him a road to the highest preferment. At that time the clergy were

<sup>1</sup> Compare the *Notes on the Metamorphoses*, Fab. v. (Tickell's edition, vol. vi. p. 183), where the substance of the above passage is found in embryo.

far from thinking it unbecoming to their cloth to fight in the political arena or to take part in journalism. Swift would have been advanced to a bishopric, as a reward for his political services, if it had not been for the prejudice entertained towards him by Queen Anne; Boulter, rector of St. Saviour's, Southwark, having made himself conspicuous by editing a paper called the *Freethinker*, was raised to the Primacy of Ireland; Hoadley, the notorious Bishop of Bangor, edited the *London Journal*; the honours that were awarded to two men of such second-rate intellectual capacity would hardly have been denied to Addison. He was inclined in this direction by the example and advice of his father, who was now Dean of Lichfield, and who was urgent on his son to rid himself of the pecuniary embarrassments in which he was involved by embracing the Church as a profession. A few years before he had himself seemed to look upon the Church as his future sphere. In his *Account of the Greatest English Poets* he says:

"I leave the arts of poetry and verse  
To them that practise them with more success.  
Of greater truths I'll now propose to tell,  
And so at once, dear friend and muse, farewell."

Had he followed up his intention we might have known the name of Addison as that of an artful controversialist, and perhaps as a famous writer of sermons; but we should, in all probability, have never heard of the *Spectator*.

Fortunately for English letters, other influences prevailed to give a different direction to his fortunes. It is true that Tickell, Addison's earliest biographer, states that his determination not to take orders was the result of his own habitual self-distrust, and of a fear of the responsibilities which the clerical office would involve. But Steele,

who was better acquainted with his friend's private history, on reading Tickell's Memoir, addressed a letter to Congreve on the subject, in which he says:

"These, you know very well, were not the reasons which made Mr. Addison turn his thoughts to the civil world; and, as you were the instrument of his becoming acquainted with Lord Halifax, I doubt not but you remember the warm instances that noble lord made to the head of the College not to insist upon Mr. Addison's going into orders. His arguments were founded upon the general pravity and corruption of men of business, who wanted liberal education. And I remember, as if I had read the letter yesterday, that my lord ended with a compliment that, however he might be represented as a friend to the Church, he never would do it any other injury than keeping Mr. Addison out of it."

No doubt the real motive of the interest in Addison shown by Lord Halifax, at that time known as Charles Montague, was an anxiety which he shared with all the leading statesmen of the period, and of which more will be said presently, to secure for his party the services of the ablest writers. Finding his *protégé* as yet hardly qualified to transact affairs of State, he joined with Lord Somers, who had also fixed his eyes on Addison, in soliciting for him from the Crown, in 1699, a pension of £300 a year, which might enable him to supplement his literary accomplishments with the practical experience of travel. Addison naturally embraced the offer. He looked forward to studying the political institutions of foreign countries, to seeing the spots of which he had read in his favourite classical authors, and to meeting the most famous men of letters on the Continent.

It is characteristic both of his own tastes and of his age that he seems to have thought his best passport to intellectual society abroad would be his Latin poems. His

verses on the *Peace of Ryswick*, written in 1697 and dedicated to Montague, had already procured him great reputation, and had been praised by Edmund Smith—a high authority—as “the best Latin poem since the *Æneid*.” This gave him the opportunity of collecting his various compositions of the same kind, and in 1699 he published from the Sheldonian Press a second volume of the *Musæ Anglicanæ*—the first having appeared in 1691—containing poems by various Oxford scholars. Among the contributors were Hannes, one of the many scholarly physicians of the period; J. Philips, the author of the *Splendid Shilling*; and Alsop, a prominent antagonist of Bentley, whose Horatian humour is celebrated by Pope in the *Dunciad*.<sup>1</sup>

But the most interesting of the names in the volume is that of the once celebrated Edmond, commonly called “Rag,” Smith, author of the *Ode on the Death of Dr. Pocock*, who seems to have been among Addison’s intimate acquaintance, and deserves to be recollected in connection with him on account of a certain similarity in their genius and the extraordinary difference in their fortunes. “Rag” was a man of fine accomplishments and graceful humour, but, like other scholars of the same class, indolent and licentious. In spite of great indulgence extended to him by the authorities of Christ Church, he was expelled from the University in consequence of his irregularities. His friends stood by him, and, through the interest of Addison, a proposal was made to him to undertake a history of the Revolution, which, however, from political scruples he felt himself obliged to decline. Like Addison, he wrote a tragedy modelled on classical lines; but, as it had no political significance, it only pleased the critics, without, like “Cato,” interesting the public. Like Addison, too, he had

<sup>1</sup> *Dunciad*, Book iv. 224.

an opportunity of profiting by the patronage of Halifax, but laziness or whim prevented him from keeping an appointment which the latter had made with him, and caused him to miss a place worth £300 a year. Addison, by his own exertions, rose to posts of honour and profit, and towards the close of his life became Secretary of State. Smith envied his advancement, and, ignoring the fact that his own failure was entirely due to himself, murmured at fortune for leaving him in poverty. Yet he estimated his wants at £600 a year, and died of indulgence when he can scarcely have been more than forty years of age.

Addison's compositions in the *Musæ Anglicanæ* are eight in number. All of them are distinguished by the ease and flow of the versification, but they are generally wanting in originality. The best of them is the *Pygmæo-Geræno-Machia*, which is also interesting as showing traces of that rich vein of humour which Addison worked out in the *Tatler* and *Spectator*. The mock-heroic style in prose and verse was sedulously cultivated in England throughout the eighteenth century. Swift, Pope, Arbuthnot, and Fielding, developed it in various forms; but Addison's Latin poem is perhaps the first composition in which the fine fancy and invention afterwards shown in the *Rape of the Lock* and *Gulliver's Travels* conspicuously displayed itself.

A literary success of this kind at that epoch gave a writer a wider reputation than he could gain by compositions in his own language. Armed, therefore, with copies of the *Musæ Anglicanæ* for presentation to scholars, and with Halifax's commendatory letters to men of political distinction, Addison started for the Continent.

## CHAPTER III.

### ADDISON ON HIS TRAVELS.

TRAVELLING in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries involved an amount of thought and precaution which would have seemed inconvenient to the tourist accustomed to abandon himself to the authority of guide-books, couriers, and railway companies. By ardent spirits like Roderick Random it was regarded as the sphere of enterprise and fortune, and not without reason, in days when adventures were to be met with on almost every road in the country, and in the streets and inns of the towns. The graver portion of society, on the other hand, considered it as part of the regular course of education through which every young man of position ought to pass before entering into active life. French was the universally recognised language of diplomacy. French manners and conversation were considered to be the best school for politeness, while Italy was held in the highest respect by the northern nations as the source of revived art and letters. Some of the most distinguished Englishmen of the time looked, it is true, with little favour on this fashionable training. "Lord Cowper," says Spence, on the information of Dr. Conybeare, "on his death-bed ordered that his son should never travel (it is by the absolute desire of the Queen that he

does). He ordered this from a good deal of observation on its effects; he had found that there was little to be hoped, and much to be feared, from travelling. Atwell, who is the young lord's tutor abroad, gives but a very discouraging account of it, too, in his letters, and seems to think that people are sent out too young, and are too hasty to find any great good from it."

On some of the stronger and more enthusiastic minds the chief effect of the grand tour was to produce a violent hatred of all foreign manners. Dennis, the critic, for instance, who, after leaving Cambridge, spent some time on the Continent, returned with a confirmed dislike to the French, and ostentatiously displayed in his writings how much he held "dragoons and wooden shoes in scorn;" and it is amusing to find Addison at a later date making his Tory fox-hunter declare this anti-Gallican temper to be the main fruits of foreign travel.

But, in general, what was intended to be a school for manners and political instruction proved rather a source of unsettlement and dissipation; and the vigorous and glowing lines in which Pope makes the tutor describe to Dullness the doings of the "young Æneas" abroad, may be taken as a faithful picture of the travelled pupil of the period:

"Intrepid then o'er seas and land he flew;  
 Europe he saw, and Europe saw him too.  
 There all thy gifts and graces we display,  
 Thou, only thou, directing all our way!  
 To where the Seine, obsequious as she runs,  
 Pours at great Bourbon's feet her silken sons;  
 Or Tyber, now no longer Roman, rolls,  
 Vain of Italian arts, Italian souls:  
 To happy convents bosomed deep in vines,  
 Where slumber abbots purple as their wines:

To isles of fragrance, lily-silvered vales,  
 Diffusing languor in the panting gales :  
 To lands of singing or of dancing slaves,  
 Love-whispering woods, and lute-resounding waves.  
 But chief her shrine where naked Venus keeps,  
 And Cupids ride the lion of the deeps ;  
 Where, eased of fleets, the Adriatic main  
 Wafts the smooth eunuch and enamoured swain.  
 Led by my hand, he sauntered Europe round,  
 And gathered every vice on Christian ground ;  
 Saw every court, heard every king declare  
 His royal sense of operas or the fair ;  
 The stews and palace equally explored,  
 Intrigued with glory, and with spirit whored ;  
 Tried all *hors-d'œuvres*, all liqueurs defined,  
 Judicious drank, and greatly daring dined ;  
 Dropped the dull lumber of the Latin store,  
 Spoiled his own language, and acquired no more ;  
 All classic learning lost on classic ground ;  
 And last turned air, the echo of a sound."

It is needless to say that Addison's experiences of travel were of a very different kind. He left England in his twenty-eighth year, with a mind well equipped from a study of the best authors, and with the intention of qualifying himself for political employment at home, after familiarising himself with the languages and manners of foreign countries. His sojourn abroad extended over four years, and his experience was more than usually varied and comprehensive. Crossing from Dover to Calais, some time in the summer of 1699, he spent nearly eighteen months in France making himself master of the language. In December, 1700, he embarked at Marseilles for a tour in Italy, and visited in succession the following places: Monaco, Genoa, Pavia, Milan, Brescia, Verona, Padua, Venice, Ferrara, Ravenna, Rimini, S. Marino, Pesaro, Fano, Sinigaglia,



Ancona, Loreto, Rome (where, as it was his intention to return, he only visited St. Peter's and the Pantheon), Naples, Capri, whence he came back to Rome by sea, the various towns in the neighbourhood of Rome, Siena, Leghorn, Pisa, Lucca, Florence, Bologna, Modena, Parma, and Turin. Thus, in the course of this journey, which lasted exactly a twelvemonth, he twice crossed the Apennines, and made acquaintance with all the more important cities in the northern part of the Peninsula. In December, 1701, he passed over Mont Cenis to Geneva, proceeding then by Fribourg, Berne, Soleure, Zurich, St. Gall, Linden, Insbruck, Hall, to Vienna, where he arrived in the autumn of 1702. After making a brief stay in the Austrian capital he turned his face homewards, and having visited the Protestant cities of Germany, and made a rather longer stay in Hamburg than in any other, he reached Holland in the spring of 1703, and remained in that country till his return to England, some time in the autumn of the same year.

During his journey he made notes for his *Remarks on Italy*, which he published immediately on his return home, and he amused himself, while crossing Mont Cenis, with composing his *Letter to Lord Halifax*, which contains, perhaps, the best verses he ever wrote. Though the ground over which he passed was well trodden, and though he possessed none of the special knowledge which gives value to the observations of travellers like Arthur Young, yet his remarks on the people and places he saw are the product of an original mind, and his illustrations of his route from the Latin poets are remarkably happy and graceful. It is interesting, also, to observe how many of the thoughts and suggestions which occurred to him on the road are afterwards worked up into papers for the *Spectator*.

When Addison landed in France, in 1699, the power of Louis XIV., so long the determined enemy of the English Revolution of 1688, had passed its climax. The Peace of Ryswick, by which the hopes of the Jacobites were finally demolished, was two years old. The king, disappointed in his dreams of boundless military glory, had fallen into a fit of devotion, and Addison, arriving from England with a very imperfect knowledge of the language, was astonished to find the whole of French literature saturated with the royal taste. "As for the state of learning," says he, in a letter to Montague, dated August, 1699, "there is no book comes out at present that has not something in it of an air of devotion. Dacier has bin forced to prove his Plato a very good Christian before he ventures upon his translation, and has so far comply'd with y<sup>e</sup> tast of the age that his whole book is overrun with texts of Scripture, and y<sup>e</sup> notion of præ-existence, supposed to be stolen from two verses of y<sup>e</sup> prophets. Nay, y<sup>e</sup> humour is grown so universal that it is got among y<sup>e</sup> poets, who are every day publishing Lives of Saints and Legends in Rhime."

Finding, perhaps, that the conversation at the capital was not very congenial to his taste, he seems to have hurried on to Blois, a town then noted for the purity with which its inhabitants spoke the French language, and where he had determined to make his temporary abode. His only record of his first impressions of Paris is a casual criticism of "y<sup>e</sup> King's Statue that is lately set up in the Place Vendome." He visited, however, both Versailles and Fontainebleau, and the preference which he gives to the latter (in a letter to Congreve) is interesting, as anticipating that taste for natural as opposed to artificial beauty which he afterwards expressed in the *Spectator*.

“I don't believe, as good a poet as you are, that you can make finer Lanships than those about the King's houses, or with all yo<sup>r</sup> descriptions build a more magnificent palace than Versailles. I am, however, so singular as to prefer Fontainebleau to the rest. It is situated among rocks and woods that give you a fine variety of Savage prospects. The King has Humoured the Genius of the place, and only made of so much art as is necessary to Help and regulate Nature, without reforming her too much. The Cascades seem to break through the Clefts and Cracks of Rocks that are covered over with Moss, and look as if they were piled upon one another by Accident. There is an artificial wildness in the Meadows, Walks, and Canals, and y<sup>e</sup> Garden, instead of a Wall, is Fenced on the Lower End by a Natural Mound of Rock-work that strikes the eye very agreeably. For my part, I think there is something more charming in these rude heaps of Stone than in so many Statues, and wou'd as soon see a River winding through Woods and Meadows as when it is tossed up in such a variety of figures at Versailles.”<sup>1</sup>

Here and there, too, his correspondence exhibits traces of that delicate vein of ridicule in which he is without a rival, as in the following inimitable description of Le Brun's paintings at Versailles :

“The painter has represented his most Xtian Majesty under y<sup>e</sup> figure of Jupiter throwing thunderbolts all about the ceiling, and striking terror into y<sup>e</sup> Danube and Rhine, that lie astonished and blasted a little above the Cornice.”

Of his life at Blois a very slight sketch has been preserved by the Abbe Philippeaux, one of the many gossiping informants from whom Spence collected his anecdotes :

“Mr. Addison stayed above a year at Blois. He would rise as

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<sup>1</sup> Compare *Spectator*, 414. “I do not know whether I am singular in my opinion, but for my part I would rather look upon a tree in all its luxuriancy and diffusion of boughs and branches, rather than when it is thus cut and trimmed into a mathematical figure; and cannot but fancy that an orchard in flower looks infinitely more delightful than all the little labyrinths of the finished parterre.”

early as between two and three in summer, and lie abed till between eleven and twelve in the depth of winter. He was untalkative while here, and often thoughtful; sometimes so lost in thought that I have come into his room and have stayed five minutes there before he has known anything of it. He had his masters generally at supper with him, kept very little company beside, and had no amour whilst here that I know of, and I think I should have known it if he had had any."

The following characteristic letter to a gentleman of Blois, with whom he seems to have had an altercation, is interesting as showing the mixture of coolness and dignity, the "blood and judgment well commingled" which Hamlet praised in Horatio, and which are conspicuous in all Addison's actions as well as in his writings:

"Sir,—I am always as slow in making an Enemy as a Friend, and am therefore very ready to come to an Accommodation with you; but as for any satisfaction, I don't think it is due on either side when y<sup>e</sup> Affront is mutual. You know very well that according to y<sup>e</sup> opinion of y<sup>e</sup> world a man would as soon be called a Knave as a Fool, and I believe most people w<sup>d</sup> be rather thought to want Legs than Brains. But I suppose whatever we said in y<sup>e</sup> heat of discourse is not y<sup>e</sup> real opinion we have of each other, since otherwise you would have scorned to subscribe yourself as I do at present, S<sup>r</sup>, y<sup>r</sup> very, etc.

A. Mons<sup>r</sup> L'Espagnol,  
Blois, 10<sup>br</sup> 1699."

The length of Addison's sojourn at Blois seems to have been partly caused by the difficulty he experienced, owing to the defectiveness of his memory, in mastering the language. Finding himself at last able to converse easily, he returned to Paris some time in the autumn of 1700, in order to see a little of polite society there before starting on his travels in Italy. He found the best company in the capital among the men of letters, and he makes especial mention of Malebranche, whom he describes as solicitous

about the adequate rendering of his works into English; and of Boileau, who, having now survived almost all his literary friends, seems, in his conversation with Addison, to have been even more than usually splenetic in his judgments on his contemporaries. The old poet and critic was, however, propitiated with the present of the *Musæ Anglicanæ*; and, according to Tickell, said "that he did not question there were excellent compositions in the native language of a country that possessed the Roman genius in so eminent a degree."

In general, Addison's remarks on the French character are not complimentary. He found the vanity of the people so elated by the elevation of the Duke of Anjou to the throne of Spain that they were insupportable, and he felt no reluctance to quit France for Italy. His observations on the national manners, as seen at Blois, are characteristic:

"Truly, by what I have yet seen, they are the Happiest nation in the world. 'Tis not in the pow'r of Want or Slavery to make 'em miserable. There is nothing to be met with in the Country but Mirth and Poverty. Ev'ry one sings, laughs, and starves. Their Conversation is generally Agreeable; for if they have any Wit or Sense they are sure to show it. They never mend upon a Second meeting, but use all the freedom and familiarity at first Sight that a long Intimacy or Abundance of wine can scarce draw from an Englishman. Their Women are perfect Mistresses in this Art of showing themselves to the best Advantage. They are always gay and sprightly, and set off y<sup>e</sup> worst faces in Europe with y<sup>e</sup> best airs. Ev'ry one knows how to give herself as charming a look and posture as S<sup>r</sup> Godfrey Kueller c<sup>d</sup> draw her in."<sup>1</sup>

He embarked from Marseilles for Genoa in December, 1700, having as his companion Edward Wortley Montague,

<sup>1</sup> Letter to the Right Honourable Charles Montague, Esq., Blois, 10<sup>br</sup> 1699.

whom Pope satirises under the various names of Shylock, Worldly, and Avidien. It is unnecessary to follow him step by step in his travels, but the reader of his *Letter to Lord Halifax* may still enjoy the delight and enthusiasm to which he gives utterance on finding himself among the scenes described in his favourite authors :

“Poetic fields encompass me around,  
 And still I seem to tread on classic ground ;  
 For here the Muse so oft her harp has strung,  
 That not a mountain rears its head unsung ;  
 Renowned in verse each shady thicket grows,  
 And every stream in heavenly numbers flows.”<sup>1</sup>

The phrase “classic ground,” which has become proverbial, is first used in these verses, and, as will have been observed, Pope repeats it with evident reference to the above passage in his satire on the travels of the “young Æneas.” Addison seems to have carried the Latin poets with him, and his quotations from them are abundant and apposite. When he is driven into the harbour at Monaco, he remembers Lucan’s description of its safety and shelter ; as he passes under Monte Circeo, he feels that Virgil’s description of Æneas’s voyage by the same spot can never be sufficiently admired ; he recalls, as he crosses the Apennines, the fine lines of Claudian recording the march of Honorius from Ravenna to Rome ; and he delights to think that at the falls of the Velino he can still see the “angry goddess” of the *Æneid* (Alecto) “thus sinking, as it were, in a tempest, and plunging herself into Hell” amidst such a scene of horror and confusion.

His enthusiastic appreciation of the classics, which caused him in judging any work of art to look, in the first place, for regularity of design and simplicity of effect, shows it-

<sup>1</sup> Letter from Italy to Lord Halifax.

self characteristically in his remarks on the Lombard and German styles of architecture in Italy. Of Milan Cathedral he speaks without much admiration, but he was impressed with the wonders of the Certosa near Pavia. "I saw," says he, "between Pavia and Milan the convent of the Carthusians, which is very spacious and beautiful. Their church is very fine and curiously adorned, *but* of a Gothic structure." His most interesting criticism, however, is that on the Duomo at Siena :

"When a man sees the prodigious pains and expense that our forefathers have been at in these barbarous buildings, one cannot but fancy to himself what miracles of architecture they would have left us had they only been instructed in the right way; for, when the devotion of those ages was much warmer than that of the present, and the riches of the people much more at the disposal of the priests, there was so much money consumed on these Gothic cathedrals as would have finished a greater variety of noble buildings than have been raised either before or since that time. One would wonder to see the vast labour that has been laid out on this single cathedral. The very spouts are loaden with ornaments, the windows are formed like so many scenes of perspective, with a multitude of little pillars retiring behind one another, the great columns are finely engraven with fruits and foliage, that run twisting about them from the very top to the bottom; the whole body of the church is chequered with different lays of black and white marble, the pavement curiously cut out in designs and Scripture stories, and the front covered with such a variety of figures, and overrun with so many mazes and little labyrinths of sculpture, that nothing in the world can make a prettier show to those who prefer false beauties and *affected ornaments* to a noble and majestic simplicity."<sup>1</sup>

Addison had not reached that large liberality in criticism afterwards attained by Sir Joshua Reynolds, who, while insisting that in all art there was but *one* true style, nevertheless allowed very high merit to what he called the

<sup>1</sup> Addison's *Works* (Tickell's edition), vol. v. p. 301.

*characteristic* styles. Sir Joshua would never have fallen into the error of imputing affectation to such simple and honest workmen as the early architects of Northern Italy. The effects of Addison's classical training are also very visible in his descriptions of natural scenery. There is in these nothing of that craving melancholy produced by a sense of the infinity of nature which came into vogue after the French Revolution; no projection of the feelings of the spectator into the external scene on which he gazes; nor, on the other hand, is there any attempt to rival the art of the painter by presenting a landscape in words instead of in colours. He looks on nature with the same clear sight as the Greek and Roman writers, and in describing a scene he selects those particulars in it which he thinks best adapted to arouse pleasurable images in the mind of the reader. Take, for instance, the following excellent description of his passage over the Apennines:

“The fatigue of our crossing the Apennines, and of our whole journey from Loretto to Rome, was very agreeably relieved by the variety of scenes we passed through. For, not to mention the rude prospect of rocks rising one above another, of the deep gutters worn in the sides of them by torrents of rain and snow-water, or the long channels of sand winding about their bottoms that are sometimes filled with so many rivers, we saw in six days' travelling the several seasons of the year in their beauty and perfection. We were sometimes shivering on the top of a bleak mountain, and a little while afterwards basking in a warm valley, covered with violets and almond-trees in blossom, the bees already swarming over them, though but in the month of February. Sometimes our road led us through groves of olives, or by gardens of oranges, or into several hollow apartments among the rocks and mountains, that look like so many natural greenhouses, as being always shaded with a great variety of trees and shrubs that never lose their verdure.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Addison's *Works* (Tickell's edition), vol. v. p. 213.



Though his thoughts during his travels were largely occupied with objects chiefly interesting to his taste and imagination, and though he busied himself with such compositions as the *Epistle from Italy*, the *Dialogue on Medals*, and the first four acts of *Cato*, he did not forget that his experience was intended to qualify him for taking part in the affairs of State. And when he reached Geneva, in December, 1701, the door to a political career seemed to be on the point of opening. He there learned, as Tickell informs us, that he had been selected to attend the army under Prince Eugene as secretary from the King. He accordingly waited in the city for official confirmation of this intelligence; but his hopes were doomed to disappointment. William III. died in March, 1702; Halifax, on whom Addison's prospects chiefly depended, was struck off the Privy Council by Queen Anne; and the travelling pension ceased with the life of the sovereign who had granted it. Henceforth he had to trust to his own resources; and though the loss of his pension does not seem to have compelled him at once to turn homewards, as he continued on his route to Vienna, yet an incident that occurred towards the close of his travels shows that he was prepared to eke out his income by undertaking work that would have been naturally irksome to him.

At Rotterdam, on his return towards England, he met with Jacob Tonson, the bookseller, for whom, as has been said, he had already done some work as a translator. Tonson was one of the founders of the Kit-Kat Club, and in that capacity was brought into frequent and intimate connection with the Whig magnates of the day. Among these was the Duke of Somerset, who, through his wife, then high in Queen Anne's favour, exercised considerable influence on the course of affairs. The Duke required a

tutor for his son, Lord Hertford, and Tonson recommended Addison. On the Duke's approval of the recommendation, the bookseller seems to have communicated with Addison, who expressed himself, in general terms, as willing to undertake the charge of Lord Hertford, but desired to know more particulars about his engagement. These were furnished by the Duke in a letter to Tonson, and they are certainly a very curious illustration of the manners of the period. "I ought," says his Grace, "to enter into that affair more freely and more plainly, and tell you what I propose, and what I hope he will comply with—viz., I desire he may be more on the account of a companion in my son's travels than as a governor, and that as such I shall account him: my meaning is, that neither lodging, travelling, nor diet shall cost him sixpence, and over and above that my son shall present him at the year's end with a hundred guineas, as long as he is pleased to continue in that service to my son, by his personal attendance and advice, in what he finds necessary during his time of travelling."

To this not very tempting proposal Addison replied: "I have lately received one or two advantageous offers of y<sup>e</sup> same nature, but as I should be very ambitious of executing any of your Grace's commands, so I can't think of taking y<sup>e</sup> like employ from any other hands. As for y<sup>e</sup> recompense that is proposed to me, I must take the liberty to assure your Grace that I should not see my account in it, but in y<sup>e</sup> hope that I have to recommend myself to your Grace's favour and approbation." This reply proved highly offensive to the Duke, who seems to have considered his own offer a magnificent one. "Your letter of the 16th," he writes to Tonson, on June 22, 1703, "with one from Mr. Addison, came safe to me. You say

he will give me an account of his readiness of complying with my proposal. I will set down his own words, which are thus: 'As for the recompense that is proposed to me, I must confess I can by no means see my account in it,' etc. All the other parts of his letter are compliments to me, which he thought he was bound in good breeding to write, and as such I have taken them, and no otherwise; and now I leave you to judge how ready he is to comply with my proposal. Therefore, I have wrote by this first post to prevent his coming to England on my account, and have told him plainly that I must look for another, which I cannot be long a-finding."

Addison's principal biographer, Miss Aikin, expresses great contempt for the niggardliness of the Duke, and says that, "Addison must often have congratulated himself in the sequel on that exertion of proper spirit by which he had escaped from wasting, in an attendance little better than servile, three precious years, which he found means of employing so much more to his own honour and satisfaction, and to the advantage of the public." Mean as the Duke's offer was, it is nevertheless plain that Addison really intended to accept it, and, this being so, he can scarcely be congratulated on having on this occasion displayed his usual tact and felicity. Two courses appear to have been open to him. He might either have simply declined the offer "as not finding his account in it," or he might have accepted it in view of the future advantages which he hoped to derive from the Duke's "favour and approbation;" in which case he should have said nothing about finding the "recompense" proposed insufficient. By the course that he took he contrived to miss an appointment which he seems to have made up his mind to accept, and

he offended an influential statesman whose favour he was anxious to secure.

To his pecuniary embarrassments was soon added domestic loss. At Amsterdam he received news of his father's death, and it may be supposed that the private business in which he must have been involved in consequence of this event brought him to England, where he arrived some time in the autumn of 1703.

## CHAPTER IV.

### HIS EMPLOYMENT IN AFFAIRS OF STATE.

ADDISON'S fortunes were now at their lowest ebb. The party from which he had looked for preferment was out of office; his chief political patron was in particular discredit at Court; his means were so reduced that he was forced to adopt a style of living not much more splendid than that of the poorest inhabitants of Grub Street. Yet within three years of his return to England he was promoted to be an Under-Secretary of State—a post from which he mounted to one position of honour after another till his final retirement from political life. That he was able to take advantage of the opportunity that offered itself was owing to his own genius and capacity; the opportunity was the fruit of circumstances which had produced an entire revolution in the position of English men of letters.

Through the greater part of Charles II.'s reign the profession of literature was miserably degraded. It is true that the King himself, a man of wit and taste, was not slow in his appreciation of art; but he was by his character insensible to what was serious or elevated, and the poetry of gallantry, which he preferred, was quite within reach of the courtiers by whom he was surrounded. Rochester, Buckingham, Sedley, and Dorset are among the

principal poetical names of the period; all of them being well qualified to shine in verse, the chief requirements of which were a certain grace of manner, an air of fashionable breeding, and a complete disregard of the laws of decency. Besides these "songs by persons of quality," the principal entertainment was provided by the drama. But the stage, seldom a lucrative profession, was then crowded with writers whose fertile, if not very lofty, invention kept down the price of plays. Otway, the most successful dramatist of his time, died in a state of indigence, and as some say, almost of starvation, while playwrights of less ability, if the house was ill-attended on the third night, when the poet received all the profits of the performance, were forced, as Oldham says, "to starve or live in tatters all the year."<sup>1</sup>

Periodical literature, in the shape of journals and magazines, had as yet no existence; nor could the satirical poet or the pamphleteer find his remuneration in controversial writing, the strong reaction against Puritanism having raised the monarchy to a position in which it was practically secure against the assaults of all its enemies. The author of the most brilliant satire of the period, who had used all the powers of a rich imagination to discredit the Puritan and Republican cause, was paid with nothing more solid than admiration, and died neglected and in want.

"The wretch, at summing up his misspent days,  
Found nothing left but poverty and praise!  
Of all his gains by verse he could not save  
Enough to purchase flannel and a grave!  
Reduced to want he in due time fell sick,  
Was fain to die, and be interred on tick;

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<sup>1</sup> Oldham's Satire *Dissuading from Poetry*.

And well might bless the fever that was sent  
To rid him hence, and his worse fate prevent.”<sup>1</sup>

In the latter part of this reign, however, a new combination of circumstances produced a great change in the character of English literature and in the position of its professors. The struggle of Parties recommenced. Wearied with the intolerable rule of the Saints, the nation had been at first glad to leave its newly-restored King to his pleasures, but, as the memories of the Commonwealth became fainter, the people watched with a growing feeling of disgust the selfishness and extravagance of the Court, while the scandalous sale of Dunkirk and the sight of the Dutch fleet on the Thames made them think of the patriotic energies which Cromwell had succeeded in arousing. At the same time the thinly-disguised inclination of the King to Popery, and the avowed opinions of his brother, raised a general feeling of alarm for the Protestant liberties of the nation. On the other hand, the Puritans, taught moderation by adversity, exhibited the really religious side of their character, and attracted towards themselves a considerable portion of the aristocracy, as well as of the commercial and professional classes in the metropolis—a combination of interests which helped to form the nucleus of the Whig party. The clergy and the landed proprietors, who had been the chief sufferers from Parliamentary rule, naturally adhered to the Court, and were nicknamed by their opponents Tories. Violent party conflicts ensued, marked by such incidents as the Test Act, the Exclusion Bill, the intrigues of Monmouth, the Popish Plot, and the trial and acquittal of Shaftesbury on the charge of high treason.

Finding his position no longer so easy as at his restora-

tion, Charles naturally bethought him of calling literature to his assistance. The stage, being completely under his control, seemed the readiest instrument for his purpose; the order went forth, and an astonishing display of monarchical fervour in all the chief dramatists of the time—Otway, Dryden, Lee, and Crowne—was the result. Shadwell, who was himself inclined to the Whig interest, laments the change:

“The stage, like old Rump pulpits, is become  
The scene of News, a furious Party’s drum.”

But the political influence of the drama and the audience to which it appealed being necessarily limited, the King sought for more powerful literary artillery, and he found it in the serviceable genius of Dryden, whose satirical and controversial poems date from this period. The wide popularity of *Absalom and Achitophel*, written against Monmouth and Shaftesbury; of *The Medal*, satirising the acquittal of Shaftesbury; of *The Hind and Panther*, composed to advance the Romanising projects of James II.; points to the vast influence exercised by literature in the party struggle. Nevertheless, in spite of all that Dryden had done for the Royal cause, in spite of the fact that he himself had more than once appealed to the poet for assistance, the ingratitude or levity of Charles was so inveterate that he let the poet’s services go almost unrequited. Dryden, it is true, held the posts of Laureate and Royal Historiographer, but his salary was always in arrears, and the letter which he addressed to Rochester, First Lord of the Treasury, asking for six months’ payment of what was due to him, tells its own story.

James II. cared nothing for literature, and was probably too dull of apprehension to understand the incalculable



service that Dryden had rendered to his cause. He showed his appreciation of the Poet-Laureate's genius by deducting £100 from the salary which his brother had promised him, and by cutting off from the emoluments of the office the time-honoured butt of canary!

Under William III. the complexion of affairs again altered. The Court, in the old sense of the word, ceased to be a paramount influence in literature. William III. derived his authority from Parliament; he knew that he must support it mainly by his sword and his statesmanship. A stranger to England, its manners and its language, he showed little disposition to encourage letters. Pope, indeed, maliciously suggests that he had the bad taste to admire the poetry of Blackmore, whom he knighted; but, as a matter of fact, the honour was conferred on the worthy Sir Richard in consequence of his distinction in medicine, and he himself bears witness to William's contempt for poetry.

“Reverse of Louis he, example rare,  
Loved to deserve the praise he could not bear.  
He shunned the acclamations of the throng,  
And always coldly heard the poet's song.  
Hence the great King the Muses did neglect,  
And the mere poet met with small respect.”<sup>1</sup>

Such political verse as we find in this reign generally consists, like Halifax's *Epistle to Lord Dorset*, or Addison's own *Address to King William*, of hyperbolic flattery. Opposition was extinct, for both parties had for the moment united to promote the Revolution, and the only discordant notes amid the chorus of adulation proceeded from Jacobite writers concealed in the garrets and cellars of Grub Street. Such an atmosphere was not fa-

<sup>1</sup> Blackmore, *The Kit-Kats*.

avorable to the production of literature of an elevated or even of a characteristic order.

Addison's return to England coincided most happily with another remarkable turn of the tide. Leaning decidedly to the Tory party, who were now strongly leavened with the Jacobite element, Anne had not long succeeded to the throne before she seized an opportunity for dismissing the Whig Ministry whom she found in possession of office. The Whigs, equally alarmed at the influence acquired by their rivals, and at the danger which threatened the Protestant succession, neglected no effort to counterbalance the loss of their sovereign's favour by strengthening their credit with the people. Having been trained in a school which had at least qualified them to appreciate the influence of style, the aristocratic leaders of the party were well aware of the advantages they would derive by attracting to themselves the services of the ablest writers of the day. Hence they made it their policy to mingle with men of letters on an equal footing, and to hold out to them an expectation of a share in the advantages to be reaped from the overthrow of their rivals.

The result of this union of forces was a great increase in the number of literary-political clubs. In its half-aristocratic, half-democratic constitution the club was the natural product of enlarged political freedom, and helped to extend the organisation of polite opinion beyond the narrow orbit of Court society. Addison himself, in his simple style, points out the nature of the fundamental principle of Association which he observed in operation all around him. "When a set of men find themselves agree in any particular, though never so trivial, they establish themselves into a kind of fraternity, and meet once or twice a week upon the account of such a fantastic resem-

blance.”<sup>1</sup> Among these societies, in the first years of the eighteenth century, the most celebrated was, perhaps, the Kit-Kat Club. It consisted of thirty-nine of the leading men of the Whig party; and, though many of these were of the highest rank, it is a characteristic fact that the founder of the club should have been the bookseller Jacob Tonson. It was probably through his influence, joined to that of Halifax, that Addison was elected a member of the society soon after his return to England. Among its prominent members was the Duke of Somerset, the first meeting between whom and Addison, after the correspondence that had passed between them, must have been somewhat embarrassing. The club assembled at one Christopher Catt’s, a pastry-cook, who gave his name both to the society and the mutton-pies which were its ordinary entertainment. Each member was compelled to select a lady as his toast, and the verses which he composed in her honour were engraved on the wine-glasses belonging to the club. Addison chose the Countess of Manchester, whose acquaintance he had made in Paris, and complimented her in the following lines:

“While haughty Gallia’s dames, that spread  
O’er their pale cheeks an artful red,  
Beheld this beauteous stranger there,  
In native charms divinely fair,  
Confusion in their looks they showed,  
And with unborrowed blushes glowed.”

Circumstances seemed now to be conspiring in favour of the Whigs. The Tories, whose strength lay mainly in the Jacobite element, were jealous of Marlborough’s ascendancy over the Queen; on the other hand, the Duchess of Marlborough, who was rapidly acquiring the chief place

<sup>1</sup> *Spectator*, No. 9.

in Anne's affections, intrigued in favour of the opposite faction. In spite, too, of her Tory predilections, the Queen, finding her throne menaced by the ambition of Louis XIV., was compelled in self-defence to look for support to the party which had most vigorously identified itself with the principles of the Revolution. She bestowed her unreserved confidence on Marlborough, and he, in order to counterbalance the influence of the Jacobites, threw himself into the arms of the Whigs. Being named Captain-General in 1704, he undertook the campaign which he brought to so glorious a conclusion on the 2d of August in that year at the battle of Blenheim.

Godolphin, who, in the absence of Marlborough, occupied the chief place in the Ministry, moved perhaps by patriotic feeling, and no doubt also by a sense of the advantage which his party would derive from this great victory, was anxious that it should be commemorated in adequate verse. He accordingly applied to Halifax as the person to whom the *sacer vates* required for the occasion would probably be known. Halifax has had the misfortune to have his character transmitted to posterity by two poets who hated him either on public or private grounds. Swift describes him as the would-be "Mæcenas of the nation," but insinuates that he neglected the wants of the poets whom he patronised:

"Himself as rich as fifty Jews,  
Was easy though they wanted shoes."

Pope also satirises the vanity and meanness of his disposition in the well-known character of Bufo. Such portraits, though they are justified to some extent by evidence coming from other quarters, are not to be too strictly examined as if they bore the stamp of historic truth. It is, at any

rate, certain that Halifax always proved himself a warm and zealous friend to Addison, and when Godolphin applied to him for a poet to celebrate Blenheim, he answered that, though acquainted with a person who possessed every qualification for the task, he could not ask him to undertake it. Being pressed for his reasons, he replied "that while too many fools and blockheads were maintained in their pride and luxury at the public expense, such men as were really an honour to their age and country were shamefully suffered to languish in obscurity; that, for his own share, he would never desire any gentleman of parts and learning to employ his time in celebrating a Ministry who had neither the justice nor the generosity to make it worth his while." In answer to this the Lord Treasurer assured Halifax that any person whom he might name as equal to the required task, should have no cause to repent of having rendered his assistance; whereupon Halifax mentioned Addison, but stipulated that all advances to the latter must come from Godolphin himself. Accordingly, Boyle, Chancellor of the Exchequer, afterwards Lord Carleton, was despatched on the embassy, and, if Pope is to be trusted, found Addison lodged up three pair of stairs over a small shop. He opened to him the subject, and informed him that, in return for the service that was expected of him, he was instructed to offer him a Commissionership of Appeal in the Excise, as a pledge of more considerable advancement in the future. The fruits of this negotiation were *The Campaign*.

Warton disposes of the merits of *The Campaign* with the cavalier criticism, so often since repeated, that it is merely "a gazette in rhyme." In one sense the judgment is no doubt just. As a poem, *The Campaign* shows neither loftiness of invention nor enthusiasm of personal feeling,

and it cannot therefore be ranked with such an ode as Horace's *Qualem ministrum*, or with Pope's very fine *Epistle* to the Earl of Oxford after his disgrace. Its methodical narrative style is scarcely misrepresented by Warton's sarcastic description of it; but it should be remembered that this style was adopted by Addison with deliberate intention. "Thus," says he, in the conclusion of the poem,

" Thus would I fain Britannia's wars rehearse  
 In the smooth records of a faithful verse;  
 That, if such numbers can o'er time prevail,  
 May tell posterity the wondrous tale.  
 When actions unadorned are faint and weak  
 Cities and countries must be taught to speak;  
 Gods may descend in factions from the skies,  
 And rivers from their oozy beds arise;  
 Fiction may deck the truth with spurious rays,  
 And round the hero cast a borrowed blaze.  
 Marlbro's exploits appear divinely bright,  
 And proudly shine in their own native light;  
 Raised in themselves their genuine charms they boast,  
 And those that paint them truest praise them most."

The design here avowed is certainly not poetical, but it is eminently business-like and extremely well adapted to the end in view. What Godolphin wanted was a set of complimentary verses on Marlborough. Addison, with infinite tact, declares that the highest compliment that can be paid to the hero is to recite his actions in their unadorned grandeur. This happy turn of flattery shows how far he had advanced in literary skill since he wrote his address *To the King*. He had then excused himself for the inadequate celebration of William's deeds on the plea that, great though these might be, they were too near the poet's own time to be seen in proper focus. A thousand years

hence, he suggests, some Homer may be inspired by the theme, "and Boyne be sung when it has ceased to flow." This could not have been very consolatory to a mortal craving for contemporary applause, and the apology offered in *The Campaign* for the prosaic treatment of the subject is far more dexterous. Bearing in mind the fact that it was written to order, and that the poet deliberately declined to avail himself of the aid of fiction, we must allow that the construction of the poem exhibits both art and dignity. The allusion to the vast slaughter at Blenheim, in the opening paragraph—

"Rivers of blood I see and hills of slain,  
An Iliad rising out of one campaign"—

is not very fortunate; but the lines describing the ambition of Louis XIV. are weighty and dignified, and the couplet indicating, through the single image of the Danube, the vast extent of the French encroachments, shows how thoroughly Addison was imbued with the spirit of classical poetry:

"The rising Danube its long race began,  
And half its course through the new conquests ran."

With equal felicity he describes the position and intervention of England, seizing at the same time the opportunity for a panegyric on her free institutions:

"Thrice happy Britain, from the kingdoms rent  
To sit the guardian of the Continent!  
That sees her bravest sons advanced so high  
And flourishing so near her prince's eye;  
Thy favourites grow not up by fortune's sport,  
Or from the crimes and follies of a court:  
On the firm basis of desert they rise,  
From long-tried faith and friendship's holy ties,

Their sovereign's well-distinguished smiles they share,  
 Her ornaments in peace, her strength in war;  
 The nation thanks them with a public voice,  
 By showers of blessings Heaven approves their choice;  
 Envy itself is dumb, in wonder lost,  
 And factions strive who shall applaud them most."

He proceeds in a stream of calm and equal verse, enlivened by dexterous allusions and occasional happy turns of expression, to describe the scenery of the Moselle; the march between the Maese and the Danube; the heat to which the army was exposed; the arrival on the Neckar; and the track of devastation left by the French armies. The meeting between Marlborough and Eugene inspires him again to raise his style:

"Great souls by instinct to each other turn,  
 Demand alliance, and in friendship burn,  
 A sudden friendship, while with outstretched rays  
 They meet each other mingling blaze with blaze.  
 Polished in courts, and hardened in the field,  
 Renowned for conquest, and in council skilled,  
 Their courage dwells not in a troubled flood  
 Of mounting spirits and fermenting blood;  
 Lodged in the soul, with virtue overruled,  
 Inflamed by reason, and by reason cooled,  
 In hours of peace content to be unknown,  
 And only in the field of battle shown:  
 To souls like these in mutual friendship joined  
 Heaven dares entrust the cause of human kind."

The celebrated passage describing Marlborough's conduct at Blenheim is certainly the finest in the poem:

"'Twas then great Marlborough's mighty soul was proved  
 That in the shock of charging hosts unmoved,  
 Amidst confusion, horror, and despair,  
 Examined all the dreadful scenes of war;



In peaceful thought the field of death surveyed,  
To fainting squadrons sent the timely aid,  
Inspired repulsed battalions to engage,  
And taught the doubtful battle where to rage.  
So when an angel by divine command  
With rising tempests shakes a guilty land,  
Such as of late o'er pale Britannia past,  
Calm and serene he drives the furious blast;  
And pleased th' Almighty's orders to perform,  
Rides in the whirlwind and directs the storm."

Johnson makes some characteristic criticisms on this simile, which indeed, he maintains, is not a simile, but "an exemplification." He says: "Marlborough is so like the angel in the poem that the action of both is almost the same, and performed by both in the same manner. Marlborough 'teaches the battle to rage;' the angel 'directs the storm;' Marlborough is 'unmoved in peaceful thought;' the angel is 'calm and serene;' Marlborough stands 'unmoved amid the shock of hosts;' the angel rides 'calm in the whirlwind.' The lines on Marlborough are just and noble; but the simile gives almost the same images a second time."

This judgment would be unimpeachable if the force of the simile lay solely in the likeness between Marlborough and the angel, but it is evident that equal stress is to be laid on the resemblance between the battle and the storm. It was Addison's intention to raise in the mind of the reader the noblest possible idea of composure and design in the midst of confusion: to do this he selected an angel as the minister of the divine purpose, and a storm as the symbol of fury and devastation; and, in order to heighten his effect, he recalls with true art the violence of the particular tempest which had recently ravaged the country. Johnson has noticed the close similarity between the per-

sons of Marlborough and the angel; but he has exaggerated the resemblance between the actions in which they are severally engaged.

*The Campaign* completely fulfilled the purpose for which it was written. It strengthened the position of the Whig Ministry, and secured for its author the advancement that had been promised him. Early in 1706 Addison, on the recommendation of Lord Godolphin, was promoted from the Commissionership of Appeals in Excise to be Under-Secretary of State to Sir Charles Hedges. The latter was one of the few Tories who had retained their position in the Ministry since the restoration of the Whigs to the favour of their sovereign, and he, too, shortly vanished from the stage like his more distinguished friends, making way for the Earl of Sunderland, a staunch Whig, and son-in-law to the Duke of Marlborough.

Addison's duties as Under-Secretary were probably not particularly arduous. In 1705 he was permitted to attend Lord Halifax to the Court of Hanover, whither the latter was sent to carry the Act for the Naturalisation of the Electress Sophia. The mission also included Vanbrugh, who, as Clarencieux King-at-Arms, was charged to invest the Elector with the Order of the Garter; the party thus constituted affording a remarkable illustration of the influence exercised by literature over the politics of the period. Addison must have obtained during this journey considerable insight into the nature of England's foreign policy, as, besides establishing the closest relations with Hanover, Halifax was also instructed to form an alliance with the United Provinces for securing the succession of the House of Brunswick to the English throne.

In the meantime his imagination was not idle. After

helping Steele in the composition of his *Tender Husband*, which was acted in 1705, he found time for engaging in a fresh literary enterprise of his own. The principles of operatic music, which had long been developed in Italy, had been slow in making their way to this country. Their introduction had been delayed partly by the French prejudices of Charles II., but more, perhaps, by the strong insular tastes of the people, and by the vigorous forms of the native drama. What the untutored English audience liked best to hear was a well-marked tune, sung in a fine natural way: the kind of music which was in vogue on the stage till the end of the seventeenth century was simply the regular drama interspersed with airs; *recitative* was unknown; and there was no attempt to cultivate the voice according to the methods practised in the Italian schools. But with the increase of wealth and travel more exacting tastes began to prevail; Italian singers appeared on the stage and exhibited to the audience capacities of voice of which they had hitherto had no experience. In 1705 was acted at the Haymarket *Arsinoe*, the first opera constructed in England on avowedly Italian principles. The words were still in English, but the dialogue was throughout in *recitative*. The composer was Thomas Clayton, who, though a man entirely devoid of genius, had travelled in Italy, and was eager to turn to account the experience which he had acquired. In spite of its badness *Arsinoe* greatly impressed the public taste; and it was soon followed by *Camilla*, a version of an opera by Bononcini, portions of which were sung in Italian, and portions in English—an absurdity on which Addison justly comments in a number of the *Spectator*. His remarks on the consequences of translating the Italian operas are equally humorous and just.

“As there was no great danger,” says he, “of hurting the sense of these extraordinary pieces, our authors would often make words of their own which were entirely foreign to the meaning of the passages they pretended to translate; their chief care being to make the numbers of the English verse answer to those of the Italian, that both of them might go to the same tune. Thus the famous song in *Camilla*,

‘Barbara si t’intendo,’ etc.

‘Barbarous woman, yes, I know your meaning,’

which expresses the resentment of an angry lover, was translated into that English lamentation,

‘Frail are a lover’s hopes,’ etc.

And it was pleasant enough to see the most refined persons of the British nation dying away and languishing to notes that were filled with the spirit of rage and indignation. It happened also very frequently where the sense was rightly translated; the necessary transposition of words, which were drawn out of the phrase of one tongue into that of another, made the music appear very absurd in one tongue that was very natural in the other. I remember an Italian verse that ran thus, word for word :

‘And turned my rage into pity,’

which the English, for rhyme’s sake, translated,

‘And into pity turned my rage.’

By this means the soft notes that were adapted to pity in the Italian fell upon the word ‘rage’ in the English; and the angry sounds that were turned to rage in the original were made to express pity in the translation. It oftentimes happened likewise that the finest notes in the air fell upon the most insignificant word in the sentence. I have known the word ‘and’ pursued through the whole gamut; have been entertained with many a melodious ‘the;’ and have heard the most beautiful graces, quavers, and divisions bestowed upon ‘then,’ ‘for,’ and ‘from,’ to the eternal honour of our English particles.”<sup>1</sup>

Perceiving these radical defects, Addison seems to have been ambitious of showing by example how they might

<sup>1</sup> *Spectator*, No. 18.

be remedied. "The great success this opera (*Arsinoe*) met with produced," says he, "some attempts of forming pieces upon Italian plans, which should give a more natural and reasonable entertainment than what can be met with in the elaborate trifles of that nation. This alarmed the poetasters and fiddlers of the town, who were used to deal in a more ordinary kind of ware, and therefore laid down an established rule, which is received as such to this day, 'That nothing is capable of being well set to music that is not nonsense.'"<sup>1</sup> The allusion to the failure of the writer's own opera of *Rosamond* is unmistakable. The piece was performed on the 2d of April, 1706, but was coldly received, and after two or three representations was withdrawn.

The reasons which the *Spectator* assigns for the catastrophe betray rather the self-love of the author than the clear perception of the critic. *Rosamond* failed because, in the first place, it was very bad as a musical composition. Misled by the favour with which *Arsinoe* was received, Addison seems to have regarded Clayton as a great musician, and he put his poem into the hands of the latter, thinking that his score would be as superior to that of *Arsinoe* as his own poetry was to the words of that opera. Clayton, however, had no genius, and only succeeded in producing what Sir John Hawkins, quoting with approbation the words of another critic, calls "a confused chaos of music, the only merit of which is its shortness."<sup>2</sup>

But it may be doubted whether in any case the most skilful composer could have produced music of a high order adapted to the poetry of *Rosamond*. The play is neither a tragedy, a comedy, nor a melodrama. It seems

<sup>1</sup> *Spectator*, No. 18.

<sup>2</sup> Sir John Hawkins' *History of Music*, vol. v. p. 137.

that Eleanor did not really poison Fair Rosamond, but only administered to her a sleeping potion, and, as she takes care to explain to the King,

“The bowl with drowsy juices filled,  
From cold Egyptian drugs distilled,  
In borrowed death has closed her eyes.”

This information proves highly satisfactory to the King, not only because he is gratified to find that Rosamond is not dead, but also because, even before discovering her supposed dead body, he had resolved, in consequence of a dream sent to him by his guardian angel, to terminate the relations existing between them. The Queen and he accordingly arrange, in a business-like manner, that Rosamond shall be quietly removed in her trance to a nunnery; a reconciliation is then effected between the husband and wife, who, as we are led to suppose, live happily ever after.

The main motive of the opera in Addison's mind appears to have been the desire of complimenting the Marlborough family. It is dedicated to the Duchess; the war-like character of Henry naturally recalls the prowess of the great modern captain; and the King is consoled by his guardian angel for the loss of Fair Rosamond with a vision of the future glories of Blenheim:

“To calm thy grief and lull thy cares,  
Look up and see  
What, after long revolving years,  
Thy bower shall be!  
When time its beauties shall deface,  
And only with its ruins grace  
The future prospect of the place!  
Behold the glorious pile ascending,  
Columns swelling, arches bending,  
Domes in awful pomp arising,  
Art in curious strokes surprising,

Foes in figured fights contending,  
Behold the glorious pile ascending."

This is graceful enough, but it scarcely offers material for music of a serious kind. Nor can the Court have been greatly impressed by the compliment paid to its morality, as contrasted with that of Charles II., conveyed as it was by the mouth of Grideline, one of the comic characters in the piece—

"Since conjugal passion  
Is come into fashion,  
And marriage so blest on the throne is,  
Like a Venus I'll shine,  
Be fond and be fine,  
And Sir Trusty shall be my Adonis."

The ill success of *Rosamond* confirmed Addison's dislike to the Italian opera, which he displayed both in his grave and humorous papers on the subject in the *Spectator*. The disquisition upon the various actors of the lion in *Hydaspes* is one of his happiest inspirations; but his serious criticisms are, as a rule, only just in so far as they are directed against the dramatic absurdities of the Italian opera. As to his technical qualifications as a critic of music, it will be sufficient to cite the opinion of Dr. Burney: "To judges of music nothing more need be said of Mr. Addison's abilities to decide concerning the comparative degrees of national excellence in the art, and the merit of particular masters, than his predilection for the productions of Clayton, and insensibility to the force and originality of Handel's compositions in *Rinaldo*."<sup>1</sup>

In December, 1708, the Earl of Sunderland was displaced to make room for the Tory Lord Dartmouth, and Addison, as Under-Secretary, following the fortunes of his superior,

<sup>1</sup> Burney's *History of Music*, vol. iv. p. 203.

found himself again without employment. Fortunately for him the Earl of Wharton was almost immediately afterwards made Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland, and offered him the lucrative post of Secretary. The Earl, who was subsequently created a Marquis, was the father of the famous Duke satirised in Pope's first *Moral Essay*; he was in every respect the opposite of Addison—a vehement Republican, a sceptic, unprincipled in his morals, venal in his methods of Government. He was nevertheless a man of the finest talents, and seems to have possessed the power of gaining personal ascendancy over his companions by a profound knowledge of character. An acquaintance with Addison, doubtless commencing at the Kit-Kat Club, of which both were members, had convinced him that the latter had eminent qualifications for the task, which the Secretary's post would involve, of dealing with men of very various conditions. Of the feelings with which Addison on his side regarded the Earl we have no record. "It is reasonable to suppose," says Johnson, "that he counteracted, as far as he was able, the malignant and blasting influence of the Lieutenant; and that, at least, by his intervention some good was done and some mischief prevented." Not a shadow of an imputation, at any rate, rests upon his own conduct as Secretary. He appears to have acted strictly on that conception of public duty which he defines in one of his papers in the *Spectator*. Speaking of the marks of a corrupt official, "Such an one," he declares, "is the man who, upon any pretence whatsoever, receives more than what is the stated and unquestioned fee of his office. Gratifications, tokens of thankfulness, despatch money, and the like specious terms, are the pretences under which corruption very frequently shelters itself. An honest man will, however, look on all these methods as unjustifiable,



and will enjoy himself better in a moderate fortune, that is gained with honour and reputation, than in an overgrown estate that is cankered with the acquisitions of rapine and exaction. Were all our offices discharged with such an inflexible integrity, we should not see men in all ages, who grow up to exorbitant wealth, with the abilities which are to be met with in an ordinary mechanic.”<sup>1</sup> His friends perhaps considered that his impartiality was somewhat overstrained, since he always declined to remit the customary fees in their favour. “For,” said he, “I may have forty friends, whose fees may be two guineas a-piece; then I lose eighty guineas, and my friends gain but two a-piece.”

He took with him as his own Secretary, Eustace Budgell, who was related to him, and for whom he seems to have felt a warm affection. Budgell was a man of considerable literary ability, and was the writer of the various papers in the *Spectator* signed “X,” some of which succeeded happily in imitating Addison’s style. While he was under his friend’s guidance his career was fairly successful, but his temper was violent, and when, at a later period of his life, he served in Ireland under a new Lieutenant and another Secretary, he became involved in disputes which led to his dismissal. A furious pamphlet against the Lord-Lieutenant, the Duke of Bolton, published by him in spite of Addison’s remonstrances, only complicated his position, and from this period his fortunes steadily declined. He lost largely in the South Sea Scheme; spent considerable sums in a vain endeavour to obtain a seat in Parliament; and at last came under the influence of his kinsman, Tindal, the well-known deist, whose will he is accused of having falsified. With his usual infelicity he happened to rouse the resentment of Pope, and was treated in conse-

<sup>1</sup> *Spectator*, No. 469.

quence to one of the deadly couplets with which that great poet was in the habit of repaying real or supposed injuries :

“ Let Budgell charge low Grub Street on his quill,  
And write whate'er he pleased—except his will.”

The lines were memorable, and were doubtless often quoted, and the wretched man finding his life insupportable, ended it by drowning himself in the Thames.

During his residence in Ireland Addison firmly cemented his friendship with Swift, whose acquaintance he had probably made after *The Campaign* had given him a leading position in the Whig party, on the side of which the sympathies of both were then enlisted. Swift's admiration for Addison was warm and generous. When the latter was on the point of embarking on his new duties, Swift wrote to a common friend, Colonel Hunter, “ Mr. Addison is hurrying away for Ireland, and I pray too much business may not spoil *le plus honnete homme du monde.*” To Archbishop King he wrote: “ Mr. Addison, who goes over our first secretary, is a most excellent person, and being my intimate friend I shall use all my credit to set him right in his notions of persons and things.” Addison's duties took him occasionally to England, and during one of his visits Swift writes to him from Ireland: “ I am convinced that whatever Government come over you will find all marks of kindness from any parliament here with respect to your employment, the Tories contending with the Whigs which should speak best of you. In short, if you will come over again when you are at leisure we will raise an army and make you King of Ireland. Can you think so meanly of a kingdom as not to be pleased that every creature in it,

who hath one grain of worth, has a veneration for you?" In his *Journal to Stella* he says, under date of October 12, 1710: "Mr. Addison's election has passed easy and undisputed; and I believe if he had a mind to be chosen king he would hardly be refused." On his side Addison's feelings were equally warm. He presented Swift with a copy of his *Remarks on Several Parts of Italy*, inscribing it—"To the most agreeable companion, the truest friend, and the greatest genius of his age."

This friendship, founded on mutual respect, was destined to be impaired by political differences. In 1710 the credit of the Whig Ministry had been greatly undermined by the combined craft of Harley and Mrs. Masham, and Swift, who was anxious as to his position, on coming over to England to press his claims on Somers and Halifax, found that they were unable to help him. He appears to have considered that their want of power proceeded from want of will; at any rate, he made advances to Harley, which were of course gladly received. The Ministry were at this time being hard pressed by the *Examiner*, under the conduct of Prior, and at their instance Addison started the *Whig Examiner* in their defence. Though this paper was written effectively and with admirable temper, party polemics were little to the taste of its author, and, after five numbers, it ceased to exist on the 8th of October. Swift, now eager for the triumph of the Tories, expresses his delight to Stella by informing her, in the words of a Tory song, that "it was down among the dead men." He himself wrote the first of his *Examiners* on the 2d of the following November, and the crushing blows with which he followed it up did much to hasten the downfall of the Ministry. As was natural, Addison was somewhat displeased at his

friend's defection. In December Swift writes to Stella, "Mr. Addison and I are as different as black and white, and I believe our friendship will go off by this d—— business of party. He cannot bear seeing me fall in so with the Ministry; but I love him still as much as ever, though we seldom meet." In January, 1710–11, he says: "I called at the coffee-house, where I had not been in a week, and talked coldly awhile with Mr. Addison; all our friendship and dearness are off; we are civil acquaintance, talk words, of course, of when we shall meet, and that's all. Is it not odd?" Many similar entries follow; but on June 26, 1711, the record is: "Mr. Addison and I talked as usual, and as if we had seen one another yesterday." And on September 14, he observes: "This evening I met Addison and pastoral Philips in the Park, and supped with them in Addison's lodgings. We were very good company, and I yet know no man half so agreeable to me as he is. I sat with them till twelve."

It was perhaps through the influence of Swift, who spoke warmly with the Tory Ministry on behalf of Addison, that the latter, on the downfall of the Whigs in the autumn of 1710, was for some time suffered to retain the Keepership of the Records in Bermingham's Tower, an Irish place which had been bestowed upon him by the Queen as a special mark of the esteem with which she regarded him, and which appears to have been worth £400 a year.<sup>1</sup> In other respects his fortunes were greatly altered by the change of Ministry. "I have within this twelvemonth," he writes to Wortley on the 21st of July, 1711, "lost a place of £2000 per ann., an estate in the Indies worth £14,000, and, what is worse than all the

<sup>1</sup> Fourth Drapier's Letter.

rest, my mistress.<sup>1</sup> Hear this and wonder at my philosophy! I find they are going to take away my Irish place from me too; to which I must add that I have just resigned my fellowship, and that stocks sink every day." In spite of these losses his circumstances were materially different from those in which he found himself after the fall of the previous Whig Ministry in 1702. Before the close of the year 1711 he was able to buy the estate of Bilton, near Rugby, for £10,000. Part of the purchase money was probably provided from what he had saved while he was Irish Secretary, and had invested in the funds; and part was, no doubt, made up from the profits of the *Tatler* and the *Spectator*. Miss Aikin says that a portion was advanced by his brother Gulston; but this seems to be an error. Two years before, the Governor of Fort St. George had died, leaving him his executor and residuary legatee. This is no doubt "the estate in the Indies" to which he refers in his letter to Wortley, but he had as yet derived no benefit from it. His brother had left his affairs in great confusion; the trustees were careless or dishonest; and though about £600 was remitted to him in the shape of diamonds in 1713, the liquidation was not complete till 1716, when only a small moiety of the sum bequeathed to him came into his hands.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Who the "mistress" was cannot be certainly ascertained. See, however, p. 146.

<sup>2</sup> Egerton MSS., British Museum (1972).

## CHAPTER V.

### THE *TATLER* AND *SPECTATOR*.

THE career of Addison, as described in the preceding chapters, has exemplified the great change effected in the position of men of letters in England by the Restoration and the Revolution; it is now time to exhibit him in his most characteristic light, and to show the remarkable service the eighteenth century essayists performed for English society in creating an organised public opinion. It is difficult for ourselves, who look on the action of the periodical press as part of the regular machinery of life, to appreciate the magnitude of the task accomplished by Addison and Steele in the pages of the *Tatler* and *Spectator*. Every day, week, month, and quarter now sees the issue of a vast number of journals and magazines intended to form the opinion of every order and section of society; but in the reign of Queen Anne the only centres of society that existed were the Court, with the aristocracy that revolved about it, and the clubs and coffee-houses, in which the commercial and professional classes met to discuss matters of general interest. The *Tatler* and *Spectator* were the first organs in which an attempt was made to give form and consistency to the opinion arising out of this social contact. But we should form a very erroneous idea of the character of these publications if we

regarded them as the sudden productions of individual genius, written in satisfaction of a mere temporary taste. Like all masterpieces in art and literature, they mark the final stage of a long and painful journey, and the merit of their inventors consists largely in the judgment with which they profited by the experience of many predecessors.

The first newspaper published in Europe was the *Gazetta* of Venice, which was written in manuscript, and read aloud at certain places in the city, to supply information to the people during the war with the Turks in 1536. In England it was not till the reign of Elizabeth that the increased facilities of communication and the growth of wealth caused the purveyance of news to become a profitable employment. Towards the end of the sixteenth century newsmongers began to issue little pamphlets reporting extraordinary intelligence, but not issued at regular periods. The titles of these publications, which are all of them that survive, show that the arts with which the framers of the placards of our own newspapers endeavour to attract attention are of venerable antiquity: "Wonderful and Strange newes out of Suffolke and Essex, where it rained wheat the space of six or seven miles" (1583); "Lamentable newes out of Monmouthshire, containinge the wonderfull and fearfull accounts of the great overflowing of the waters in the said countrye" (1607).<sup>1</sup>

In 1622 one Nathaniel Butter began to publish a newspaper bearing a fixed title and appearing at stated intervals. It was called the *Weekly Newes from Italy and Germanie, etc.*, and was said to be printed for *Mercurius Britannicus*. This novelty provided much food for merriment to the poets, and Ben Jonson in his *Staple of News*

<sup>1</sup> Andrews' *History of British Journalism*.

satirises Butter, under the name of Nathaniel, in a passage which the curious reader will do well to consult, as it shows the low estimation in which newspapers were then held.<sup>1</sup>

Though it might appear from Jonson's dialogue that the newspapers of that day contained many items of domestic intelligence, such was scarcely the case. Butter and his contemporaries, as was natural to men who confined themselves to the publication of news without attempting to form opinion, obtained their materials almost entirely from abroad, whereby they at once aroused more vividly the imagination of their readers, and doubtless gave more scope to their own invention. Besides, they were not at liberty to retail home news of that political kind which would have been of the greatest interest to the public. For a long time the evanescent character of the newspaper allowed it to escape the attention of the licenser, but the growing demand for this sort of reading at last brought it under supervision, and so strict was the control exercised over even the reports of foreign intelligence that its weekly appearance was frequently interrupted.

In 1641, however, the Star-chamber was abolished, and the heated political atmosphere of the times generated a new species of journal, in which we find the first attempt to influence opinion through the periodical press. This was the newspaper known under the generic title of *Mercury*. Many weekly publications of this name appeared during the Civil Wars on the side of both King and Parliament, *Mercurius Anlicus* being the representative organ of the Royalist cause, and *Mercurius Pragmaticus* and *Mercurius Politicus* of the Republicans. Party animosities were thus kept alive, and proved so inconvenient to the

<sup>1</sup> *Staple of News*, Act I. Scene 2.



Government that the Parliament interfered to curtail the liberty of the press. In 1647 an ordinance passed the House of Lords, prohibiting any person from "making, writing, printing, selling, publishing, or uttering, or causing to be made, any book, sheet, or sheets of news whatsoever, except the same be licensed by both or either House of Parliament, with the name of the author, printer, and licenser affixed." In spite of this prohibition, which was renewed by Act of Parliament in 1662, many unlicensed periodicals continued to appear, till in 1663 the Government, finding their repressive measures insufficient, resolved to grapple with the difficulty by monopolising the right to publish news.

The author of this new project was the well-known Roger L'Estrange, who in 1663 obtained a patent assigning to him "all the sole privilege of writing, printing, and publishing all Narratives, Advertisements, Mercuries, Intelligencers, Diurnals, and other books of public intelligence." L'Estrange's journal was called the *Public Intelligencer*; it was published once a week, and in its form was a rude anticipation of the modern newspaper, containing as it did an obituary, reports of the proceedings in Parliament and in the Court of Claims, a list of the circuits of the judges, of sheriffs, Lent preachers, etc. After being continued for two years it gave place first, in 1665, to the *Oxford Gazette*, published at Oxford, whither the Court had retired during the plague; and in 1666 to the *London Gazette*, which was under the immediate control of an Under-Secretary of State. The office of Gazetteer became henceforth a regular ministerial appointment, and was viewed with different eyes according as men were affected towards the Government. Steele, who held it, says of it: "My next appearance as a writer was in the quality of the

lowest Minister of State—to wit, in the office of Gazetteer; where I worked faithfully according to order, without ever erring against the rule observed by all Ministers, to keep that paper very innocent and very insipid.” Pope, on the other hand, who regarded it as an organ published to influence opinion in favour of the Government, is constant in his attacks upon it, and has immortalised it in the memorable lines in the *Dunciad* beginning, “Next plunged a feeble but a desperate pack,” etc.

In 1679 the Licensing Act passed in 1662 expired, and the Parliament declined to renew it. The Court was thus left without protection against the expression of public opinion, which was daily becoming more bold and outspoken. In his extremity the King fell back on the servility of the judges, and, having procured from them an opinion that the publishing of any printed matter without license was contrary to the common law, he issued his famous Proclamation (in 1680) “to prohibit and forbid all persons whatsoever to print or publish any news, book, or pamphlets of news, not licensed by his Majesty’s authority.”

Disregard of the proclamation was treated as a breach of the peace, and many persons were punished accordingly. This severity produced the effect intended. The voice of the periodical press was stifled, and the *London Gazette* was left almost in exclusive possession of the field of news. When Monmouth landed in 1685 the King managed to obtain from Parliament a renewal of the Licensing Act for seven years, and even after the Revolution of 1688 several attempts were made by the Ministerial Whigs to prolong or to renew the operation of the Act. In spite, however, of the violence of the organs of “Grub Street,” which had grown up under it, these attempts were unsuccessful; it

was justly felt that it was wiser to leave falsehood and scurrility to be gradually corrected by public opinion, as speaking through an unfettered press, than to attack them by a law which they had proved themselves able to defy. From 1682 the freedom of the press may therefore be said to date, and the lapse of the Licensing Act was the signal for a remarkable outburst of journalistic enterprise and invention. Not only did the newspapers devoted to the report of foreign intelligence reappear in greatly increased numbers, but, whereas the old *Mercuries* had never been published more than once in the same week, the new comers made their appearance twice and sometimes even three times. In 1702 was printed the first daily newspaper, *The Daily Courant*. It could only at starting provide material to cover one side of a half sheet of paper; but the other side was very soon covered with printed matter, in which form its existence was prolonged till 1735.

The development of party government of course encouraged the controversial capacities of the journalist, and many notorious, and some famous names are now found among the combatants in the political arena. On the side of the Whigs the most redoubtable champions were Daniel Defoe, of the *Review*, who was twice imprisoned and once set in the pillory for his political writings; John Tutchin, of the *Observer*; and Ridpath, of the *Flying Post*—all of whom have obtained places in the *Dunciad*. The old Tories appear to have been satisfied during the early part of Queen Anne's reign with prosecuting the newspapers that attacked them; but Harley, who understood the power of the press, engaged Prior to harass the Whigs in the *Examiner*, and was afterwards dexterous enough to secure the invaluable assistance of Swift for the same paper. In opposition to the *Examiner* in its early days the Whigs,

as has been said, started the *Whig Examiner*, under the auspices of Addison, so that the two great historical parties had their cases stated by the two greatest prose-writers of the first half of the eighteenth century.

Beside the Quidnunc and the party politician, another class of reader now appeared demanding aliment in the press. Men of active and curious minds, with a little leisure and a large love of discussion, loungers at Will's or at the Grecian Coffee-Houses, were anxious to have their doubts on all subjects resolved by a printed oracle. Their tastes were gratified by the ingenuity of John Dunton, whose strange account of his *Life and Errors* throws a strong light on the literary history of this period. In 1690 Dunton published his *Athenian Gazette*, the name of which he afterwards altered to the *Athenian Mercury*. The object of this paper was to answer questions put to the editor by the public. These were of all kinds—on religion, casuistry, love, literature, and manners—no question being too subtle or absurd to extract a reply from the conductor of the paper. The *Athenian Mercury* seems to have been read by as many distinguished men of the period as *Notes and Queries* in our own time, and there can be no doubt that the quaint humours it originated gave the first hint to the inventors of the *Tatler* and the *Spectator*.

Advertisements were inserted in the newspapers at a comparatively early period of their existence. The editor acted as middleman between the advertiser and the public, and made his announcements in a style of easy frankness which will appear to the modern reader extremely refreshing. Thus, in the "Collection for the Improvement of Husbandry and Trade" (1682), there are the following:

“If I can meet with a sober man that has a counter-tenor voice, I can help him to a place worth thirty pound the year or more.

“If any noble or other gentleman wants a porter that is very lusty, comely, and six foot high and two inches, I can help.

“I want a complete young man that will wear a livery, to wait on a very valuable gentleman; but he must know how to play on a violin or flute.

“I want a genteel footman that can play on the violin, to wait on a person of honour.”<sup>1</sup>

Everything was now prepared for the production of a class of newspaper designed to form and direct public opinion on rational principles. The press was emancipated from State control; a reading public had constituted itself out of the *habitués* of the coffee-houses and clubs; nothing was wanted but an inventive genius to adapt the materials at his disposal to the circumstances of the time. The required hero was not long in making his appearance.

Richard Steele, the son of an official under the Irish Government, was, above all things, “a creature of ebullient heart.” Impulse and sentiment were with him always far stronger motives of action than reason, principle, or even interest. He left Oxford, without taking a degree, from an ardent desire to serve in the army, thereby sacrificing his prospect of succeeding to a family estate; his extravagance and dissipation while serving in the cavalry were notorious; yet this did not dull the clearness of his moral perceptions, for it was while his excesses were at their height that he dedicated to his commanding officer, Lord Cutts, his *Christian Hero*. Vehement in his political, as in all other feelings, he did not hesitate to resign the office he held under the Tory Government in 1711 in order to

<sup>1</sup> Andrews' *History of British Journalism*.

attack it for what he considered its treachery to the country; but he was equally outspoken, and with equal disadvantage to himself, when he found himself at a later period in disagreement with the Whigs. He had great fertility of invention, strong natural humour, true though uncultivated taste, and inexhaustible human sympathy.

His varied experience had made him well acquainted with life and character, and in his office of Gazetteer he had had an opportunity of watching the eccentricities of the public taste, which, now emancipated from restraint, began vaguely to feel after new ideals. That, under such circumstances, he should have formed the design of treating current events from a humorous point of view was only natural, but he was indebted for the form of his newspaper to the most original genius of the age. Swift had early in the eighteenth century exercised his ironical vein by treating the everyday occurrences of life in a mock-heroic style. Among his pieces of this kind that were most successful in catching the public taste were the humorous predictions of the death of Partridge, the astrologer, signed with the name of Isaac Bickerstaff. Steele, seizing on the name and character of Partridge's fictitious rival, turned him with much pleasantry into the editor of a new journal, the design of which he makes Isaac describe as follows :

“The state of conversation and business in this town having long been perplexed with Pretenders in both kinds, in order to open men's minds against such abuses, it appeared no unprofitable undertaking to publish a Paper, which should observe upon the manners of the pleasurable, as well as the busy part of mankind. To make this generally read, it seemed the most proper method to form it by way of a Letter of Intelligence, consisting of such parts as might gratify the curiosity of persons of all conditions and of each sex. . . . The general purposes of this Paper is to expose the false arts of life, to pull off the disguises of cunning, vanity, and affectation, and to recom-

mend a general simplicity in our dress, our discourse, and our behaviour.”<sup>1</sup>

The name of the *Tatler*, Isaac informs us, was “invented in honour of the fair sex,” for whose entertainment the new paper was largely designed. It appeared three times a week, and its price was a penny, though it seems that the first number, published April 12, 1709, was distributed *gratis* as an advertisement. In order to make the contents of the paper varied it was divided into five portions, of which the editor gives the following account :

“All accounts of Gallantry, Pleasure, and Entertainment, shall be under the article of White’s Chocolate-House ; Poetry under that of Will’s Coffee-House ; Learning under the title of Grecian ; Foreign and Domestic News you will have from Saint James’ Coffee-House ; and what else I have to offer on any other subject shall be dated from my own apartment.”<sup>2</sup>

In this division we see the importance of the coffee-houses as the natural centres of intelligence and opinion. Of the four houses mentioned, St. James’ and White’s, both of them in St. James’ Street, were the chief haunts of statesmen and men of fashion, and the latter had acquired an infamous notoriety for the ruinous gambling of its *habitués*. Will’s, in Russell Street, Covent Garden, kept up the reputation which it had procured in Dryden’s time as the favourite meeting-place of men of letters ; while the Grecian, in Devereux Court in the Strand, which was the oldest coffee-house in London, afforded a convenient *rendezvous* for the learned Templars. At starting, the design announced in the first number was adhered to with tolerable fidelity. The paper dated from St. James’ Coffee-House was always devoted to the recital of foreign news ; that from Will’s either criticised the current dramas, or con-

<sup>1</sup> *Tatler*, No. 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

tained a copy of verses from some author of repute, or a piece of general literary criticism; the latest gossip at White's was reproduced in a fictitious form and with added colour. Advertisements were also inserted; and half a sheet of the paper was left blank, in order that at the last moment the most recent intelligence might be added in manuscript, after the manner of the contemporary newspapers. In all these respects the character of the newspaper was preserved; but in the method of treating news adopted by the editor there was a constant tendency to subordinate matter of fact to the elements of humour, fiction, and sentiment. In his survey of the manners of the time, Isaac, as an astrologer, was assisted by a familiar spirit, named Pacolet, who revealed to him the motives and secrets of men; his sister, Mrs. Jenny Distaff, was occasionally deputed to produce the paper from the wizard's "own apartment;" and Kidney, the waiter at St. James' Coffee-House, was humorously represented as the chief authority in all matters of foreign intelligence.

The mottoes assumed by the *Tatler* at different periods of its existence mark the stages of its developement. On its first appearance, when Steele seems to have intended it to be little more than a lively record of news, the motto placed at the head of each paper was

"Quidquid agunt homines,  
nostri est farrago libelli."

It soon became evident, however, that its true function was not merely to report the actions of men, but to discuss the propriety of their actions; and by the time that sufficient material had accumulated to constitute a volume, the essayists felt themselves justified in appropriating the words used by Pliny in the preface to his *Natural History* :



“Nemo apud nos qui idem tentaverit: equidem sentio peculiarem in studiis causam eorum esse, qui difficultatibus victis, utilitatem juvandi, protulerunt gratiæ placendi. Res ardua vetustis novitatem dare, novis auctoritatem, obsoletis nitorem, fastidiis gratiam, dubiis fidem, omnibus vero naturam, et naturæ suæ omnia. Itaque NON ASSECUTIS voluisse, abunde pulchrum atque magnificum est.”

The disguise of the mock astrologer proved very useful to Steele in his character of moralist. It enabled him to give free utterance to his better feelings, without the risk of incurring the charge of inconsistency or hypocrisy, and nothing can be more honourable to him than the open manner in which he acknowledges his own unfitness for the position of a moralist: “I shall not carry my humility so far,” says he, “as to call myself a vicious man, but at the same time must confess my life is at best but pardonable. With no greater character than this, a man would make but an indifferent progress in attacking prevailing and fashionable vices, which Mr. Bickerstaff has done with a freedom of spirit that would have lost both its beauty and efficacy had it been pretended to by Mr. Steele.”<sup>1</sup>

As Steele cannot claim the sole merit of having invented the form of the *Tatler*, so, too, it must be remembered that he could never have addressed society in the high moral tone assumed by Bickerstaff if the road had not been prepared for him by others. One name among his predecessors stands out with a special title to honourable record. Since the Restoration the chief school of manners had been the stage, and the flagrant example of immorality set by the Court had been bettered by the invention of the comic dramatists of the period. Indecency was the fashion; religion and sobriety were identified by the polite world with Puritanism and hypocrisy. Even the Church

<sup>1</sup> *Tatler*, No. 271.

had not yet ventured to say a word in behalf of virtue against the prevailing taste, and when at last a clergyman raised his voice on behalf of the principles which he professed, the blow which he dealt to his antagonists was the more damaging because it was entirely unexpected. Jeremy Collier was not only a Tory but a Jacobite, not only a High Churchman but a Nonjuror, who had been outlawed for his fidelity to the principles of Legitimism ; and that such a man should have published the *Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage*, reflecting, as the book did, in the strongest manner on the manners of the fallen dynasty, was as astounding as thunder from a clear sky. Collier, however, was a man of sincere piety, whose mind was for the moment occupied only by the overwhelming danger of the evil which he proposed to attack. It is true that his method of attack was cumbersome, and that his conclusions were far too sweeping and often unjust ; nevertheless, the general truth of his criticisms was felt to be irresistible. Congreve and Vanbrugh each attempted an apology for their profession ; both, however, showed their perception of the weakness of their position by correcting or recasting scenes in their comedies to which Collier had objected. Dryden accepted the reproof in a nobler spirit. Even while he had pandered to the tastes of the times, he had been conscious of his treachery to the cause of true art, and had broken out in a fine passage in his *Ode to the Memory of Mrs. Kiligrew* :

“ O gracious God ! how far have we  
Profaned thy heavenly gift of poesy !  
Made prostitute and profligate the Muse,  
Debased to each obscene and impious use !  
• • • • •

“O wretched we! why were we hurried down  
 This lubrique and adulterous age  
 (Nay, added fat pollutions of our own)  
 To increase the streaming ordure of the stage?”

When Collier attacked him he bent his head in submission. “In many things,” says he, “he has taxed me justly, and I have pleaded guilty to all thought and expressions of mine which can be truly argued of obscenity, profaneness, or immorality, and retract them. If he be my enemy, let him triumph; if he be my friend, as I have given him no personal occasion to be otherwise, he will be glad of my repentance.”<sup>1</sup>

The first blow against fashionable immorality having been boldly struck, was followed up systematically. In 1690 was founded “The Society for the Reformation of Manners,” which published every year an account of the progress made in suppressing profaneness and debauchery by its means. It continued its operations till 1738, and during its existence prosecuted, according to its own calculations, 101,683 persons. William III. showed himself prompt to encourage the movement which his subjects had begun. The *London Gazette* of 27th February, 1698-99, contains a report of the following remarkable order:

“His Majesty being informed, That, notwithstanding an order made the 4th of June, 1697, by the Earl of Sunderland, then Lord Chamberlain of His Majesty’s Household, to prevent the Profaneness and Immorality of the Stage, several Plays have been lately acted containing expressions contrary to Religion and Good Manners: and whereas the Master of the Revels has represented, That, in contempt of the said order, the actors do often neglect to leave out such Profane and Indecent expressions as he has thought proper to be omitted. These are therefore to signify his Majesty’s

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<sup>1</sup> *Preface to the Fables.*

pleasure, that you do not hereafter presume to act anything in any play contrary to Religion and Good Manners as you shall answer it at your utmost peril. Given under my Hand this 18th of February, 1698. In the eleventh year of his Majesty's reign."

It is difficult to realise, in reading the terms of this order, that only thirteen years had elapsed since the death of Charles II., and undoubtedly a very large share of the credit due for such a revolution in the public taste is to be assigned to Collier. Collier, however, did nothing in a literary or artistic sense to improve the character of English literature. His severity, uncompromising as that of the Puritans, inspired Vice with terror, but could not plead with persuasion on behalf of Virtue; his sweeping conclusions struck at the roots of Art as well as of Immorality. He sought to destroy the drama and kindred pleasures of the Imagination, not to reform them. What the age needed was a writer to satisfy its natural desires for healthy and rational amusement, and Steele, with his strongly-developed twofold character, was the man of all others to bridge over the chasm between irreligious licentiousness and Puritanical rigidity. Driven headlong on one side of his nature towards all the tastes and pleasures which absorbed the Court of Charles II., his heart in the midst of his dissipation never ceased to approve of whatever was great, noble, and generous. He has described himself with much feeling in his disquisition on the *Rake*, a character which he says many men are desirous of assuming without any natural qualifications for supporting it:

"A Rake," says he, "is a man always to be pitied; and if he lives one day is certainly reclaimed; for his faults proceed not from choice or inclination, but from strong passions and appetites, which are in youth too violent for the curb of reason, good sense, good manners, and good nature; all which he must have by nature and education

before he can be allowed to be or to have been of this order. . . . His desires run away with him through the strength and force of a lively imagination, which hurries him on to unlawful pleasures before reason has power to come in to his rescue."

That impulsiveness of feeling which is here described, and which was the cause of so many of Steele's failings in real life, made him the most powerful and persuasive advocate of Virtue in fiction. Of all the imaginative English essayists he is the most truly natural. His large heart seems to rush out in sympathy with any tale of sorrow or exhibition of magnanimity; and even in criticism, his true natural instinct, joined to his constitutional enthusiasm, often raises his judgments to a level with those of Addison himself, as in his excellent essay in the *Spectator* on Raphael's cartoons. Examples of these characteristics in his style are to be found in the *Story of Unnion and Valentine*,<sup>1</sup> and in the fine paper describing two tragedies of real life;<sup>2</sup> in the series of papers on duelling, occasioned by a duel into which he was himself forced against his own inclination;<sup>3</sup> and in the sound advice which Isaac gives to his half-sister Jenny on the morrow of her marriage.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps, however, the chivalry and generosity of feeling which make Steele's writings so attractive are most apparent in the delightful paper containing the letter of Serjeant Hall from the camp before Mons. After pointing out to his readers the admirable features in the serjeant's simple letter, Steele concludes as follows:

"If we consider the heap of an army, utterly out of all prospect of rising and preferment, as they certainly are, and such great things

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<sup>1</sup> *Tatler*, No. 5.

<sup>2</sup> *Ib.*, No. 82.

<sup>3</sup> *Ib.*, Nos. 25, 26, 28, 29, 38, 39.

<sup>4</sup> *Ib.*, No. 85.

executed by them, it is hard to account for the motive of their gallantry. But to me, who was a cadet at the battle of Coldstream, in Scotland, when Monk charged at the head of the regiment now called Coldstream, from the victory of that day—I remember it as well as if it were yesterday; I stood on the left of old West, who I believe is now at Chelsea—I say to me, who know very well this part of mankind, I take the gallantry of private soldiers to proceed from the same, if not from a nobler, impulse than that of gentlemen and officers. They have the same taste of being acceptable to their friends, and go through the difficulties of that profession by the same irresistible charm of fellowship and the communication of joys and sorrows which quickens the relish of pleasure and abates the anguish of pain. Add to this that they have the same regard to fame, though they do not expect so great a share as men above them hope for; but I will engage Serjeant Hall would die ten thousand deaths rather than that a word should be spoken at the Red Lettice, or any part of the Butcher Row, in prejudice to his courage or honesty. If you will have my opinion, then, of the Serjeant's letter, I pronounce the style to be mixed, but truly epistolary; the sentiment relating to his own wound in the sublime; the postscript of Pegg Hartwell in the gay; and the whole the picture of the bravest sort of men, that is to say, a man of great courage and small hopes."<sup>1</sup>

With such excellences of style and sentiment it is no wonder that the *Tatler* rapidly established itself in public favour. It was a novel experience for the general reader to be provided three times a week with entertainment that pleased his imagination without offending his sense of decency or his religious instincts. But a new hand shortly appeared in the *Tatler*, which was destined to carry the art of periodical essay-writing to a perfection beside which even the humour of Steele appears rude and unpolished. Addison and Steele had been friends since boyhood. They had been contemporaries at the Charter House, and, as we have seen, Steele had sometimes spent his holidays in the parsonage of Addison's father. He

<sup>1</sup> *Tatler*, No. 87.

was a postmaster at Merton about the same time that his friend was a Fellow of Magdalen. The admiration which he conceived for the hero of his boyhood lasted, as so often happens, through life; he exhibited his veneration for him in all places, and even when Addison indulged his humour at his expense he showed no resentment. Addison, on his side, seems to have treated Steele with a kind of gracious condescension. The latter was one of the few intimate friends to whom he unbent in conversation; and while he was Under-Secretary of State he aided him in the production of *The Tender Husband*, which was dedicated to him by the author. Of this play Steele afterwards declared with characteristic impulse that many of the most admired passages were the work of his friend, and that he "thought very meanly of himself that he had never publicly avowed it."

The authorship of the *Tatler* was at first kept secret to all the world. It is said that the hand of Steele discovered itself to Addison on reading in the fifth number a remark which he remembered to have himself made to Steele on the judgment of Virgil, as shown in the appellation of "Dux Trojanus," which the Latin poet assigns to Æneas, when describing his adventure with Dido in the cave, in the place of the usual epithet of "pius" or "pater." Thereupon he offered his services as a contributor, and these were of course gladly accepted. The first paper sent by Addison to the *Tatler* was No. 18, wherein is displayed that inimitable art which makes a man appear infinitely ridiculous by the ironical commendation of his offences against right, reason, and good taste. The subject is the approaching peace with France, and it is noticeable that the article of foreign news, which had been treated in previous *Tatlers* with complete serious-

ness, is here for the first time invested with an air of pleasantry. The distress of the news-writers at the prospect of peace is thus described :

“There is another sort of gentlemen whom I am much more concerned for, and that is the ingenious fraternity of which I have the honour to be an unworthy member ; I mean the news-writers of Great Britain, whether Post-men or Post-boys, or by what other name or title soever dignified or distinguished. The case of these gentlemen is, I think, more hard than that of the soldiers, considering that they have taken more towns and fought more battles. They have been upon parties and skirmishes when our armies have lain still, and given the general assault to many a place when the besiegers were quiet in their trenches. They have made us masters of several strong towns many weeks before our generals could do it, and completed victories when our greatest captains have been glad to come off with a drawn battle. Where Prince Eugene has slain his thousands Boyer has slain his ten thousands. This gentleman can indeed be never enough commended for his courage and intrepidity during this whole war : he has laid about him with an inexpressible fury, and, like offended Marius of ancient Rome, made such havoc among his countrymen as must be the work of two or three ages to repair. . . . It is impossible for this ingenious sort of men to subsist after a peace : every one remembers the shifts they were driven to in the reign of King Charles the Second, when they could not furnish out a single paper of news without lighting up a comet in Germany or a fire in Moscow. There scarce appeared a letter without a paragraph on an earthquake. Prodigies were grown so familiar that they had lost their name, as a great poet of that age has it. I remember Mr. Dyer, who is justly looked upon by all the foxhunters in the nation as the greatest statesman our country has produced, was particularly famous for dealing in whales, in so much that in five months’ time (for I had the curiosity to examine his letters on that occasion) he brought three into the mouth of the river Thames, besides two porpusses and a sturgeon.”

The appearance of Addison as a regular contributor to the *Tatler* gradually brought about a revolution in the



character of the paper. For some time longer, indeed, articles continued to be dated from the different coffee-houses, but only slight efforts were made to distinguish the materials furnished from White's, Will's, or Isaac's own apartment. When the hundredth number was reached a fresh address is given at Shere Lane, where the astrologer lived, and henceforward the papers from White's and Will's grow extremely rare; those from the Grecian may be said to disappear; and the foreign intelligence, dated from St. James', whenever it is inserted, which is seldom, is as often as not made the text of a literary disquisition. Allegories become frequent, and the letters sent, or supposed to be sent, to Isaac at his home address furnish the material for many numbers. The Essay, in fact, or that part of the newspaper which goes to form public opinion, preponderates greatly over that portion which is devoted to the report of news. Spence quotes from a Mr. Chute: "I have heard Sir Richard Steele say that, though he had a greater share in the *Tatlers* than in the *Spectators*, he thought the news article in the first of these was what contributed much to their success."<sup>1</sup> Chute, however, seems to speak with a certain grudge against Addison, and the statement ascribed by him to Steele is intrinsically improbable. It is not very likely that, as the proprietor of the *Tatler*, he would have dispensed with any element in it that contributed to its popularity, yet after No. 100 the news articles are seldom found. The truth is that Steele recognised the superiority of Addison's style, and with his usual quickness accommodated the form of his journal to the genius of the new contributor.

"I have only one gentleman," says he, in the preface to the *Tatler*,

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<sup>1</sup> Spence's *Anecdotes*, p. 325.

“who will be nameless, to thank for any frequent assistance to me, which indeed it would have been barbarous in him to have denied to one with whom he has lived in intimacy from childhood, considering the great ease with which he is able to despatch the most entertaining pieces of this nature. This good office he performed with such force of genius, humour, wit, and learning that I fared like a distressed prince who calls in a powerful neighbour to his aid; I was undone by my own auxiliary; when I had once called him in I could not subsist without dependence on him.”

With his usual enthusiastic generosity, Steele, in this passage, unduly depreciates his own merits to exalt the genius of his friend. A comparison of the amount of material furnished to the *Tatler* by Addison and Steele respectively shows that out of 271 numbers the latter contributed 188 and the former only 42. Nor is the disparity in quantity entirely balanced by the superior quality of Addison's papers. Though it was, doubtless, his fine workmanship and admirable method which carried to perfection the style of writing initiated in the *Tatler*, yet there is scarcely a department of essay-writing developed in the *Spectator* which does not trace its origin to Steele. It is Steele who first ventures to raise his voice against the prevailing dramatic taste of the age on behalf of the superior morality and art of Shakespeare's plays.

“Of all men living,” says he, in the eighth *Tatler*, “I pity players (who must be men of good understanding to be capable of being such) that they are obliged to repeat and assume proper gestures for representing things of which their reason must be ashamed, and which they must disdain their audience for approving. The amendment of these low gratifications is only to be made by people of condition, by encouraging the noble representation of the noble characters drawn by Shakespeare and others, from whence it is impossible to return without strong impressions of honour and humanity. On these occasions distress is laid before us with all its causes and consequences, and our resentment placed according to the merit of the

person afflicted. Were dramas of this nature more acceptable to the taste of the town, men who have genius would bend their studies to excel in them."

Steele, too, it was who attacked, with all the vigour of which he was capable, the fashionable vice of gambling. So severe were his comments on this subject in the *Tatler* that he raised against himself the fierce resentment of the whole community of sharpers, though he was fortunate enough at the same time to enlist the sympathies of the better part of society. "Lord Forbes," says Mr. Nichols, the antiquary, in his notes to the *Tatler*, "happened to be in company with the two military gentlemen just mentioned" (Major-General Davenport and Brigadier Bisset) "in St. James' Coffee-House when two or three well-dressed men, all unknown to his lordship or his company, came into the room, and in a public, outrageous manner abused Captain Steele as the author of the *Tatler*. One of them, with great audacity and vehemence, swore that he would cut Steele's throat or teach him better manners. 'In this country,' said Lord Forbes, 'you will find it easier to cut a purse than to cut a throat.' His brother officers instantly joined with his lordship and turned the cut-throats out of the coffee-house with every mark of disgrace."<sup>1</sup>

The practice of duelling, also, which had hitherto passed unreprieved, was censured by Steele in a series of papers in the *Tatler*, which seemed to have been written on an occasion when, having been forced to fight much against his will, he had the misfortune dangerously to wound his antagonist.<sup>2</sup> The sketches of character studied from life, and the letters from fictitious correspondents, both of

<sup>1</sup> *Tatler*, vol. iv. p. 545 (Nichols' edition).

<sup>2</sup> See p. 93, note 3.

which form so noticeable a feature in the *Spectator*, appear roughly, but yet distinctly, drafted in the *Tatler*. Even the papers of literary criticism, afterwards so fully elaborated by Addison, are anticipated by his friend, who may fairly claim the honour to have been the first to speak with adequate respect of the genius of Milton.<sup>1</sup> In a word, whatever was perfected by Addison was begun by Steele; if the one has for ever associated his name with the *Spectator*, the other may justly appropriate the credit of the *Tatler*, a work which bears to its successor the same kind of relation that the frescoes of Masaccio bear, in point of dramatic feeling and style, to those of Raphael; the later productions deserving honour for finish of execution, the earlier for priority of invention.

The *Tatler* was published till the 2d of January, 1710-11, and was discontinued, according to Steele's own account, because the public had penetrated his disguise, and he was therefore no longer able to preach with effect in the person of Bickerstaff. It may be doubted whether this was his real motive for abandoning the paper. He had been long known as its conductor; and that his readers had shown no disinclination to listen to him is proved, not only by the large circulation of each number of the *Tatler*, but by the extensive sale of the successive volumes of the collected papers at the high price of a guinea apiece. He was, in all probability, led to drop the publication by finding that the political element that the paper contained was a source of embarrassment to him. His sympathies were vehemently Whig; the *Tatler* from the beginning had celebrated the virtues of Marlborough and his friends, both directly and under cover of fiction; and he had been rewarded for his services with a commissionership of the

<sup>1</sup> *Tatler*, No. 6.

Stamp-office. When the Whig Ministry fell in 1710, Harley, setting a just value on the abilities of Steele, left him in the enjoyment of his office and expressed his desire to serve him in any other way. Under these circumstances, Steele no doubt felt it incumbent on him to discontinue a paper which, both from its design and its traditions, would have tempted him into the expression of his political partialities.

For two months, therefore, "the censorship of Great Britain," as he himself expressed it, "remained in commission," until Addison and he once more returned to discharge the duties of the office in the *Spectator*, the first number of which was published on the 1st of March, 1710-11. The *Tatler* had only been issued three times a week, but the conductors of the new paper were now so confident in their own resources and in the favour of the public that they undertook to bring out one number daily. The new paper at once exhibited the impress of Addison's genius, which had gradually transformed the character of the *Tatler* itself. The latter was originally, in every sense of the word, a newspaper, but the *Spectator* from the first indulged his humour at the expense of the clubs of Quiddnuncs.

"There is," says he, "another set of men that I must likewise lay a claim to as being altogether unfurnished with ideas till the business and conversation of the day has supplied them. I have often considered these poor souls with an eye of great commiseration when I have heard them asking the first man they have met with whether there was any news stirring, and by that means gathering together materials for thinking. These needy persons do not know what to talk of till about twelve o'clock in the morning; for by that time they are pretty good judges of the weather, know which way the wind sets, and whether the Dutch mail be come in. As they lie at the mercy of the first man they meet, and are grave or impertinent

all the day long, according to the notions which they have imbibed in the morning, I would earnestly entreat them not to stir out of their chambers till they have read this paper; and do promise them that I will daily instil into them such sound and wholesome sentiments as shall have a good effect on their conversation for the ensuing twelve hours."<sup>1</sup>

For these, and other men of leisure, a kind of paper differing from the *Tatler*, which proposed only to retail the various species of gossip in the coffee-houses, was required, and the new entertainment was provided by the original design of an imaginary club, consisting of several ideal types of character grouped round the central figure of the *Spectator*. They represent considerable classes or sections of the community, and are, as a rule, men of strongly marked opinions, prejudices, and foibles, which furnish inexhaustible matter of comment to the *Spectator* himself, who delivers the judgments of reason and common-sense. Sir Roger de Coverley, with his simplicity, his high sense of honour, and his old-world reminiscences, reflects the country gentleman of the best kind; Sir Andrew Freeport expresses the opinions of the enterprising, hard-headed, and rather hard-hearted moneyed interest; Captain Sentry speaks for the army; the Templar for the world of taste and learning; the clergyman for theology and philosophy; while Will Honeycomb, the elderly man of fashion, gives the *Spectator* many opportunities for criticising the traditions of morality and breeding surviving from the days of the Restoration. Thus, instead of the division of places which determined the arrangement of the *Tatler*, the different subjects treated in the *Spectator* are distributed among a variety of persons: the Templar is substituted for the Grecian Coffee-House and Will's;

<sup>1</sup> *Spectator*, No. 10.

Will Honeycomb takes the place of White's; and Captain Sentry, whose appearances are rare, stands for the more voluminous article on foreign intelligence published in the old periodical, under the head of St. James's. The Spectator himself finds a natural prototype in Isaac Bickerstaff, but his character is drawn with a far greater finish and delicacy, and is much more essential to the design of the paper which he conducts, than was that of the old astrologer.

The aim of the Spectator was to establish a rational standard of conduct in morals, manners, art, and literature.

"Since," says he in one of his early numbers, "I have raised to myself so great an audience, I shall spare no pains to make their instruction agreeable and their diversion useful. For which reason I shall endeavour to enliven morality with wit, and to temper wit with morality, that my readers may, if possible, both ways find their account in the speculation of the day. And to the end that their virtue and discretion may not be short, transient, intermitting starts of thought, I have resolved to refresh their memories from day to day till I have recovered them out of that desperate state of vice and folly into which the age has fallen. The mind that lies fallow but a single day sprouts up in follies that are only to be killed by a constant and assiduous culture. It was said of Socrates that he brought Philosophy down from heaven to inhabit among men; and I shall be ambitious to have it said of me that I have brought Philosophy out of closets and libraries, schools and colleges, to dwell in clubs and assemblies, at tea-tables and in coffee-houses."<sup>1</sup>

Johnson, in his *Life of Addison*, says that the task undertaken in the *Spectator* was "first attempted by Casa in his book of *Manners*, and Castiglione in his *Courtier*; two books yet celebrated in Italy for purity and elegance, and which, if they are now less read, are neglected only because they have effected that reformation which their

<sup>1</sup> *Spectator*, No. 10.

authors intended, and their precepts now are no longer wanted." He afterwards praises the *Tatler* and *Spectator* by saying that they "adjusted, like Casa, the unsettled practice of daily intercourse by propriety and politeness, and, like La Bruyère, exhibited the characters and manners of the age." This commendation scarcely does justice to the work of Addison and Steele. Casa, a man equally distinguished for profligacy and politeness, merely codified in his *Galateo* the laws of good manners which prevailed in his age. He is the Lord Chesterfield of Italy. Castiglione gives instructions to the young courtier how to behave in such a manner as to make himself agreeable to his prince. La Bruyère's characters are no doubt the literary models of those which appear in the *Spectator*. But La Bruyère merely described what he saw, with admirable wit, urbanity, and scholarship, but without any of the earnestness of a moral reformer. He could never have conceived the character of Sir Roger de Coverley; and, though he was ready enough to satirise the follies of society as an observer from the outside, to bring "philosophy out of closets and libraries, to dwell in clubs and assemblies," was far from being his ambition. He would probably have thought the publication of a newspaper scarcely consistent with his position as a gentleman.

A very large portion of the *Spectator* is devoted to reflections on the manners of women. Addison saw clearly how important a part the female sex was destined to play in the formation of English taste and manners. Removed from the pedestal of enthusiastic devotion on which they had been placed during the feudal ages, women were treated under the Restoration as mere playthings and luxuries. As manners became more decent they found themselves secured in their emancipated position but destitute of se-



rious and rational employment. It was Addison's object, therefore, to enlist the aid of female genius in softening, refining, and moderating the gross and conflicting tastes of a half-civilised society.

"There are none," he says, "to whom this paper will be more useful than to the female world. I have often thought there has not been sufficient pains taken in finding out proper employments and diversions for the fair ones. Their amusements seem contrived for them, rather as they are women than as they are reasonable creatures, and are more adapted to the sex than to the species. The toilet is their great scene of business, and the right adjustment of their hair the principal employment of their lives. The sorting of a suit of ribands is reckoned a very good morning's work; and if they make an excursion to a mercer's or a toy shop, so great a fatigue makes them unfit for anything else all the day after. Their more serious occupations are sewing and embroidery, and their greatest drudgery the preparations of jellies and sweetmeats. This, I say, is the state of ordinary women, though I know there are multitudes of those of a more elevated life and conversation that move in an exalted sphere of knowledge and virtue, that join all the beauties of the mind to the ornaments of dress, and inspire a kind of awe and respect, as well as of love, into their male beholders. I hope to increase the number of these by publishing this daily paper, which I shall always endeavour to make an innocent, if not an improving entertainment, and by that means, at least, divert the minds of my female readers from greater trifles."<sup>1</sup>

To some of the vigorous spirits of the age the mild and social character of the *Spectator's* satire did not commend itself. Swift, who had contributed several papers to the *Tatler* while it was in its infancy, found it too feminine for his taste. "I will not meddle with the *Spectator*," says he in his *Journal to Stella*, "let him *fair sex* it to the world's end." Personal pique, however, may have done as much as a differing taste to depreciate the *Spec-*

<sup>1</sup> *Spectator*, No. 10.

tator in the eyes of the author of the *Tale of a Tub*, for he elsewhere acknowledges its merits. "The *Spectator*," he writes to Stella, "is written by Steele, with Addison's help; it is often very pretty . . . . But I never see him (Steele) or Addison." That part of the public to whom the paper was specially addressed read it with keen relish. In the ninety-second number a correspondent, signing herself "Leonora,"<sup>1</sup> writes:

"Mr. Spectator,—Your paper is a part of my tea-equipage; and my servant knows my humour so well that, calling for my breakfast this morning (it being past my usual hour), she answered, the *Spectator* was not yet come in, but the tea-kettle boiled, and she expected it every moment."

In a subsequent number "Thomas Trusty" writes:

"I constantly peruse your paper as I smoke my morning's pipe (though I can't forbear reading the motto before I fill and light), and really it gives a grateful relish to every whiff; each paragraph is fraught either with useful or delightful notions, and I never fail of being highly diverted or improved. The variety of your subjects surprises me as much as a box of pictures did formerly, in which there was only one face, that by pulling some pieces of isinglass over it was changed into a grave senator or a merry-andrew, a polished lady or a nun, a beau or a blackamoor, a prude or a coquette, a country squire or a conjuror, with many other different representations very entertaining (as you are), though still the same at the bottom."<sup>2</sup>

The *Spectator* was read in all parts of the country.

"I must confess," says Addison, as his task was drawing to an end, "that I am not a little gratified and obliged by that concern which appears in this great city upon my present design of laying down this paper. It is likewise with much satisfaction that I find some of the most outlying parts of the kingdom alarmed upon this

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<sup>1</sup> The writer was a Miss Shepherd.

<sup>2</sup> *Spectator*, No. 134.

occasion, having received letters to expostulate with me about it from several of my readers of the remotest boroughs of Great Britain." <sup>1</sup>

With how keen an interest the public entered into the humour of the paper is shown by the following letter, signed "Philo-Spec:"

"I was this morning in a company of your well-wishers, when we read over, with great satisfaction, Tully's observations on action adapted to the British theatre, though, by the way, we were very sorry to find that you have disposed of another member of your club. Poor Sir Roger is dead, and the worthy clergyman dying; Captain Sentry has taken possession of a fair estate; Will Honeycomb has married a farmer's daughter; and the Templar withdraws himself into the business of his own profession." <sup>2</sup>

It is no wonder that readers anticipated with regret the dissolution of a society that had provided them with so much delicate entertainment. Admirably as the club was designed for maintaining that variety of treatment on which Mr. Trusty comments in the letter quoted above, the execution of the design is deserving of even greater admiration. The skill with which the grave speculations of the *Spectator* are contrasted with the lively observations of Will Honeycomb on the fashions of the age, and these again are diversified with papers descriptive of character or adorned with fiction, while the letters from the public outside form a running commentary on the conduct of the paper, cannot be justly appreciated without a certain effort of thought. But it may safely be said that, to have provided society day after day, for more than two years, with a species of entertainment which, nearly two centuries later, retains all its old power to interest and delight, is an achievement unique in the history of literature. Even apart from the exquisite art displayed in their grouping, the matter of many

H <sup>1</sup> *Spectator*, No. 553.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 542.

of the essays in the *Spectator* is still valuable. The vivid descriptions of contemporary manners, the inimitable series of sketches of Sir Roger de Coverley, the criticisms in the papers on *True and False Wit* and Milton's *Paradise Lost*, have scarcely less significance for ourselves than for the society for which they were immediately written.

Addison's own papers were 274 in number, as against 236 contributed by Steele. They were, as a rule, signed with one of the four letters C. L. I. O., either because, as Tickell seems to hint in his *Elegy*, they composed the name of one of the Muses, or, as later scholars have conjectured, because they were respectively written from four different localities—viz., Chelsea, London, Islington, and the Office.

The sale of the *Spectator* was doubtless very large relatively to the number of readers in Queen Anne's reign. Johnson, indeed, computes the number sold daily to have been only sixteen hundred and eighty, but he seems to have overlooked what Addison himself says on the subject very shortly after the paper had been started: "My publisher tells me that there are already three thousand of them distributed every day."<sup>1</sup> This number must have gone on increasing with the growing reputation of the *Spectator*. When the Preface of the *Four Sermons* of Dr. Fleetwood, Bishop of Llandaff, was suppressed by order of the House of Commons, the *Spectator* printed it in its 384th number, thus conveying, as the Bishop said in a letter to Burnet, Bishop of Salisbury, "fourteen thousand copies of the condemned preface into people's hands that would otherwise have never seen or heard of it." Making allowance for the extraordinary character of the number, it is not unreasonable to conclude that the usual daily issue of the *Spectator* to readers in all parts of the kingdom would, towards the close of its career, have reached ten thousand copies. The sep-

<sup>1</sup> *Spectator*, No. 10.

arate papers were afterwards collected into octavo volumes, which were sold, like the volumes of the *Tatler*, for a guinea apiece. Steele tells us that more than nine thousand copies of each volume were sold off.<sup>1</sup>

Nothing could have been better timed than the appearance of the *Spectator*; it may indeed be doubted whether it could have been produced with success at any other period. Had it been projected earlier, while Addison was still in office, his thoughts would have been diverted to other subjects, and he would have been unlikely to survey the world with quite impartial eyes; had the publication been delayed it would have come before the public when the balance of all minds was disturbed by the dangers of the political situation. The difficulty of preserving neutrality under such circumstances was soon shown by the fate of the *Guardian*. Shortly after the *Spectator* was discontinued this new paper was designed by the fertile invention of Steele, with every intention of keeping it, like its predecessor, free from the entanglements of party. But it had not proceeded beyond the forty-first number when the vehement partizanship of Steele was excited by the Tory *Examiner*; in the 128th number appeared a letter, signed "An English Tory," calling for the demolition of Dunkirk, while soon afterwards, finding that his political feelings were hampered by the design on which the *Guardian* was conducted, he dropped it and replaced it with a paper called the *Englishman*. Addison himself, who had been a frequent contributor to the *Guardian*, did not aid in the *Englishman*, of the violent party tone of which he strongly disapproved. A few years afterwards the old friends and coadjutors in the *Tatler* and *Spectator* found themselves maintaining an angry controversy in the opposing pages of the *Old Whig* and the *Plebeian*.

<sup>1</sup> *Spectator*, No. 555.

## CHAPTER VI.

### CATO.

It is a peculiarity in Addison's life that Fortune, as if conspiring with the happiness of his genius, constantly furnished him with favourable opportunities for the exercise of his powers. The pension granted him by Halifax enabled him, while he was yet a young man, to add to his knowledge of classical literature an intimate acquaintance with the languages and governments of the chief European states. When his fortunes were at the lowest ebb on his return from his travels, his introduction to Godolphin by Halifax, the consequence of which was *The Campaign*, procured him at once celebrity and advancement. The appearance of the *Tatler*, though due entirely to the invention of Steele, prepared the way for development of the genius that prevailed in the *Spectator*. But the climax of Addison's good fortune was certainly the successful production of *Cato*, a play which, on its own merits, might have been read with interest by the scholars of the time, but which could scarcely have succeeded on the stage if it had not been appropriated and made part of our national life by the violence of political passion.

Addison had not the genius of a dramatist. The grace, the irony, the fastidious refinement which give him such an unrivalled capacity in describing and criticising the hu-

mours of men as a *spectator* did not qualify him for imaginative sympathy with their actions and passions. But, like most men of ability in that period, his thoughts were drawn towards the stage, and even in Dryden's lifetime he had sent him a play in manuscript, asking him to use his interest to obtain its performance. The old poet returned it, we are told, "with many commendations, but with an expression of his opinion that on the stage it would not meet with its deserved success." Addison, nevertheless, persevered in his attempts, and during his travels he wrote four acts of the tragedy of *Cato*, the design of which, according to Tickell, he had formed while he was at Oxford, though he certainly borrowed many incidents in the play from a tragedy on the same subject which he saw performed at Venice.<sup>1</sup> It is characteristic, however, of the undramatic mood in which he executed his task that the last act was not written till shortly before the performance of the play, many years later. As early as 1703 the drama was shown to Cibber by Steele, who said that "whatever spirit Mr. Addison had shown in his writing it, he doubted that he would ever have courage enough to let his *Cato* stand the censure of an English audience; that it had only been the amusement of his leisure hours in Italy, and was never intended for the stage." He seems to have remained of the same opinion on the very eve of the performance of the play. "When Mr. Addison," says Pope, as reported by Spence, "had finished his *Cato* he brought it to me, desired to have my sincere opinion of it, and left it with me for three or four days. I gave him my opinion of it sincerely, which was, 'that I thought he had better not act it, and that he would get reputation enough by only printing it.' This I said as thinking the lines well written, but

<sup>1</sup> See Addison's *Works* (Tickell's edition), vol. v. p. 187.

the piece not theatrical enough. Some time after Mr. Addison said 'that his own opinion was the same with mine, but that some particular friends of his, whom he could not disoblige, insisted on its being acted.'"<sup>1</sup>

Undoubtedly, Pope was right in principle, and anybody who reads the thirty-ninth paper in the *Spectator* may see not only that Addison was out of sympathy with the traditions of the English stage, but that his whole turn of thought disqualified him from comprehending the motives of dramatic composition. "The modern drama," says he, "exceeds that of Greece and Rome in the intricacy and disposition of the fable—but, what a Christian writer would be ashamed to own, falls infinitely short of it in the moral part of the performance." And the entire drift of the criticism that follows relates to the thought, the sentiment, and the expression of the modern drama, rather than to the really essential question, the nature of the action. It is false criticism to say that the greatest dramas of Shakespeare fail in morality as compared with those of the Greek tragedians. That the manner in which the moral is conveyed is different in each case is of course true, since the subjects of Greek tragedy were selected from Greek mythology, and were treated by Æschylus and Sophocles, at all events, in a religious spirit, whereas the plays of Shakespeare are only indirectly Christian, and produce their effect by an appeal to the individual conscience. None the less is it the case that *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, and *Lear* have for modern audiences a far deeper moral meaning than the *Agamemnon* or the *Œdipus Tyrannus*. The tragic motive in Greek tragedy is the impotence of man in the face of moral law or necessity; in Shakespeare's tragedies it is the corruption of the will, some sin of the individual against

<sup>1</sup> Spence's *Anecdotes*, p. 196.



the law of God, which brings its own punishment. There was nothing in this principle of which a Christian dramatist need have been ashamed; and as regards Shakespeare, at any rate, it is evident that Addison's criticism is unjust.

It is, however, by no means undeserved in its application to the class of plays which grew up after the Restoration. Under that *régime* the moral spirit of the Shakesperian drama entirely disappears. The king, whose temper was averse to tragedy, and whose taste had been formed on French models, desired to see every play end happily. "I am going to end a piece," writes Roger, Earl of Orrery, to a friend, "in the French style, because I have heard the King declare that he preferred their manner to our own." The greatest tragedies of the Elizabethan age were transformed to suit this new fashion; even King Lear obtained a happy deliverance from his sufferings in satisfaction of the requirements of an effeminate Court. Addison very wittily ridicules this false taste in the fortieth number of the *Spectator*. He is not less felicitous in his remarks on the sentiments and the style of the Caroline drama, though he does not sufficiently discriminate his censure, which he bestows equally on the dramatists of the Restoration and on Shakespeare. Two main characteristics appear in all the productions of the former epoch—the monarchical spirit and the fashion of gallantry. The names of the plays speak for themselves: on the one hand, *The Indian Emperor*, *Aurengzebe*, *The Indian Queen*, *The Conquest of Granada*, *The Fate of Hannibal*; on the other, *Secret Love*, *Tyrannic Love*, *Love and Vengeance*, *The Rival Queens*, *Theodosius*, or *the Power of Love*, and numberless others of the same kind. In the one set of dramas the poet sought to arouse the passion of pity by exhibiting the downfall of persons of high estate; in the other

he appealed to the sentiment of romantic passion. Such were the fruits of that taste for French romance which was encouraged by Charles II., and which sought to disguise the absence of genuine emotion by the turgid bombast of its sentiment and the epigrammatic declamation of its rhymed verse.

At the same time, the taste of the nation having been once turned into French channels, a remedy for these defects was naturally sought for from French sources; and just as the school of Racine and Boileau set its face against the extravagances of the romantic coteries, so Addison and his English followers, adopting the principles of the French classicists, applied them to the reformation of the English theatre. Hence arose a great revival of respect for the poetical doctrines of Aristotle, regard for the unities of time and place, attention to the proprieties of sentiment and diction—in a word, for all those characteristics of style afterwards summed up in the phrase “correctness.”

This habit of thought, useful as an antidote to extravagance, was not fertile as a motive of dramatic production. Addison worked with strict and conscious attention to his critical principles: the consequence is that his *Cato*, though superficially “correct,” is a passionless and mechanical play. He had combated with reason the “ridiculous doctrine in modern criticism, that writers of tragedy are obliged to an equal distribution of rewards and punishments, and an impartial execution of poetical justice.”<sup>1</sup> But his reasoning led him on to deny that the idea of justice is an essential element in tragedy. “We find,” says he, “that good and evil happen alike to all men on this side the grave; and, as the principal design of tragedy is to raise commiseration and terror in the

<sup>1</sup> *Spectator*, No. 40.

minds of the audience, we shall defeat this great end if we always make virtue and innocence happy and successful. . . . The ancient writers of tragedy treated men in their plays as they are dealt with in the world, by making virtue sometimes happy and sometimes miserable, as they found it in the fable which they made choice of, or as it might affect their audience in the most agreeable manner."<sup>1</sup> But it is certain that the fable which the two greatest of the Greek tragedians "made choice of" was always of a religious nature, and that the idea of Justice was never absent from it; it is also certain that Retribution is a vital element in all the tragedies of Shakespeare. The notion that the essence of tragedy consists in the spectacle of a good man struggling with adversity is a conception derived through the French from the Roman Stoics; it is not found in the works of the greatest tragic poets.

This, however, was Addison's central motive, and this is what Pope, in his famous Prologue, assigns to him as his chief praise:

"Our author shuns by vulgar springs to move  
 The hero's glory or the virgin's love;  
 In pitying love we but our weakness show,  
 And wild ambition well deserves its woe.  
 Here tears shall flow from a more generous cause,  
 Such tears as patriots shed for dying laws:  
 He bids your breasts with ancient ardour rise,  
 And calls forth Roman drops from British eyes.  
 Virtue confessed in human shape he draws—  
 What Plato thought, and godlike Cato was:  
 No common object to your sight displays,  
 But what with pleasure heav'n itself surveys;  
 A brave man struggling in the storms of fate,  
 And greatly falling with a falling state."

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<sup>1</sup> *Spectator*, No. 40.

A falling state offers a tragic spectacle to the thought and the reason, but not one that can be represented on the stage so as to move the passions of the spectators. The character of Cato, as exhibited by Addison, is an abstraction, round which a number of other lay figures are skilfully grouped for the delivery of lofty and appropriate sentiments. Juba, the virtuous young prince of Numidia, the admirer of Cato's virtue, Portius and Marcus, Cato's virtuous sons, and Marcia, his virtuous daughter, are all equally admirable and equally lifeless. Johnson's criticism of the play leaves little to be said :

"About things," he observes, "on which the public thinks long it commonly attains to think right; and of *Cato* it has not been unjustly determined that it is rather a poem in dialogue than a drama, rather a succession of just sentiments in elegant language than a representation of natural affections, or of any state probable or possible in human life. Nothing here 'excites or assuages emotion;' here is 'no magical power of raising fantastic terror or wild anxiety.' The events are expected without solicitude, and are remembered without joy or sorrow. Of the agents we have no care; we consider not what they are doing or what they are suffering; we wish only to know what they have to say. Cato is a being above our solicitude; a man of whom the gods take care, and whom we leave to their care with heedless confidence. To the rest neither gods nor men can have much attention, for there is not one among them that strongly attracts either affection or esteem. But they are made the vehicles of such sentiments and such expressions that there is scarcely a scene in the play which the reader does not wish to impress upon his memory."

To this it may be added that, from the essentially undramatic bent of Addison's genius, whenever he contrives a train of incident he manages to make it a little absurd. Dennis has pointed out with considerable humour the consequences of his conscientious adherence to the unity of place, whereby every species of action in the

play—love-making, conspiracy, debating, and fighting—is made to take place in the “large hall in the governor’s palace of Utica.” It is strange that Addison’s keen sense of the ridiculous, which inspired so happily his criticisms on the allegorical paintings at Versailles,<sup>1</sup> should not have shown him the incongruities which Dennis discerned; but, in truth, they pervade the atmosphere of the whole play. All the actors—the distracted lovers, the good young man, Juba, and the blundering conspirator, Sempronius—seem to be oppressed with an uneasy consciousness that they have a character to sustain, and are not confident of coming up to what is expected of them. This is especially the case with Portius, a pragmatic young Roman, whose praiseworthy but futile attempts to unite the qualities of Stoical fortitude, romantic passion, and fraternal loyalty, exhibit him in a position of almost comic embarrassment. According to Pope, “the love part was flung in after, to comply with the popular taste;” but the removal of these scenes would make the play so remarkably barren of incident that it is a little difficult to credit the statement.

The deficiencies of *Cato* as an acting play were, however, more than counterbalanced by the violence of party spirit, which insisted on investing the comparatively tame sentiments assigned to the Roman champions of liberty with a pointed modern application. In 1713 the rage of the contending factions was at its highest point. The Tories were suspected, not without reason, of designs against the Act of Settlement; the Whigs, on the other hand, were still suffering in public opinion from the charge of having, for their own advantage, protracted the war with Louis XIV. Marlborough had been accused in 1711 of receiving bribes

<sup>1</sup> See p. 43.

while commander-in-chief, and had been dismissed from all his employments. Disappointment, envy, revenge, and no doubt a genuine apprehension for the public safety, inspired the attacks of the Whigs upon their rivals; and when it was known that Addison had in his drawers an unfinished play on so promising a subject as *Cato*, great pressure was put upon him by his friends to complete it for the stage. Somewhat unwillingly, apparently, he roused himself to the task. So small, indeed, was his inclination for it, that he is said in the first instance to have asked Hughes, afterwards author of the *Siege of Damascus*, to write a fifth act for him. Hughes undertook to do so, but on returning a few days afterwards with his own performance, he found that Addison had himself finished the play. In spite of the judgment of the critics, *Cato* was quickly hurried off for rehearsal, doubtless with many fears on the part of the author. His anxieties during this period must have been great. "I was this morning," writes Swift to Stella on the 6th of April, "at ten, at the rehearsal of Mr. Addison's play, called *Cato*, which is to be acted on Friday. There was not half a score of us to see it. We stood on the stage, and it was foolish enough to see the actors prompted every moment, and the poet directing them, and the drab that acts *Cato's* daughter (Mrs. Oldfield) out in the midst of a passionate part, and then calling out, 'What's next?'"

Mrs. Oldfield not only occasionally forgot the poet's text, she also criticised it. She seems to have objected to the original draft of a speech of Portius in the second scene of the third act; and Pope, whose advice Addison appears to have frequently asked, suggested the present reading:

"Fixt in astonishment, I gaze upon thee  
Like one just blasted by a stroke from heaven

Who pants for breath, and *stiffens, yet alive,*  
In dreadful looks: a monument of wrath."<sup>1</sup>

Pope also proposed the alteration of the last line in the play from

"And oh, 'twas this that ended Cato's life,"

to

"And robs the guilty world of Cato's life;"

and he was generally the cause of many modifications. "I believe," said he to Spence, "Mr. Addison did not leave a word unchanged that I objected to in his *Cato*."<sup>2</sup>

On the 13th of April the play was ready for performance, and contemporary accounts give a vivid picture of the eagerness of the public, the excitement of parties, and the apprehensions of the author. "On our first night of acting it," says Cibber, in his *Apology*, speaking of the subsequent representation at Oxford, "our house was, in a manner, invested, and entrance demanded by twelve o'clock at noon; and before one it was not wide enough for many who came too late for their places. The same crowds continued for three days together—an uncommon curiosity in that place; and the death of Cato triumphed over the injuries of Cæsar everywhere." The prologue—a very fine one—was contributed by Pope; the epilogue—written, according to the execrable taste fashionable after the Restoration, in a comic vein—by Garth. As to the performance itself, a very lively record of the effect it produced remains in Pope's letter to Trumbull of the 30th April, 1713:

"Cato was not so much the wonder of Rome in his days as he is of Britain in ours; and though all the foolish industry possible had been used to make it thought a party play, yet what the author

<sup>1</sup> Spence's *Anecdotes*, p. 151.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

said of another may the most properly be applied to him on this occasion :

‘Envy itself is dumb, in wonder lost,  
And factions strive who shall applaud him most!’<sup>1</sup>

The numerous and violent claps of the Whig party on the one side of the theatre were echoed back by the Tories on the other, while the author sweated behind the scenes with concern to find their applause proceeding more from the hand than the head. This was the case, too, with the Prologue-writer, who was clapped into a staunch Whig at the end of every two lines. I believe you have heard that, after all the applauses of the opposite faction, my Lord Bolingbroke sent for Booth, who played Cato, into the box, between one of the acts, and presented him with fifty guineas, in acknowledgment, as he expressed it, for defending the cause of liberty so well against a perpetual dictator. The Whigs are unwilling to be distanced this way, and therefore design a present to the same Cato very speedily; in the meantime they are getting ready as good a sentence as the former on their side; so betwixt them it is probable that Cato (as Dr. Garth expressed it) may have something to live upon after he dies.”

The Queen herself partook, or feigned to partake, of the general enthusiasm, and expressed a wish that the play should be dedicated to her. This honour had, however, been already designed by the poet for the Duchess of Marlborough, so that, finding himself unable under the circumstances to fulfil his intentions, he decided to leave the play without any dedication. *Cato* ran for the then unprecedented period of thirty-five nights. Addison appears to have behaved with great liberality to the actors, and, at Oxford, to have handed over to them all the profits of the first night’s performance; while they in return, Cibber tells us, thought themselves “obliged to spare no pains in the proper decorations” of the piece.

The fame of *Cato* spread from England to the Continent. It was twice translated into Italian, twice into French, and

<sup>1</sup> These lines are to be found in *The Campaign*, see p. 66.



once into Latin; a French and a German imitation of it were also published. Voltaire, to whom Shakespeare appeared no better than an inspired barbarian, praises it in the highest terms. "*The first English writer who composed a regular tragedy* and infused a spirit of elegance through every part of it was," says he, "the illustrious Mr. Addison. His *Cato* is a masterpiece, both with regard to the diction and the harmony and beauty of the numbers. The character of *Cato* is, in my opinion, greatly superior to that of *Cornelia* in the *Pompey* of *Corneille*, for *Cato* is great without anything of fustian, and *Cornelia*, who besides is not a necessary character, tends sometimes to bombast." Even he, however, could not put up with the love-scenes:

"Addison l'a déjà tenté ;  
C'étoit le poëte des sages,  
Mais il étoit trop concerté,  
Et dans son *Caton* si vanté  
Les deux filles en vérité,  
Sont d'insipides personages.  
Imitez du grand Addison  
Seulement ce qu'il a de bon."

There were, of course, not wanting voices of detraction. A graduate of Oxford attacked *Cato* in a pamphlet entitled *Mr. Addison turned Tory*, in which the party spirit of the play was censured. Dr. Sewell, a well-known physician of the day—afterwards satirised by Pope as "Sanguine Sewell"—undertook Addison's defence, and showed that he owed his success to the poetical, and not to the political, merits of his drama. A much more formidable critic appeared in John Dennis, a specimen of whose criticism on *Cato* is preserved in Johnson's *Life*, and who, it must be owned, went a great deal nearer the mark in his judgment than did Voltaire. Dennis had many of the qualities of

a good critic. Though his judgment was often overborne by his passion, he generally contrived to fasten on the weak points of the works which he criticised, and he at once detected the undramatic character of *Cato*. His ridicule of the absurdities arising out of Addison's rigid observance of the unity of place is extremely humorous and quite unanswerable. But, as usual, he spoiled his case by the violence and want of discrimination in his censure, which betrayed too plainly the personal feelings of the writer. It is said that Dennis was offended with Addison for not having adequately exhibited his talents in the *Spectator* when mention was made of his works; and he certainly did complain in a published letter that Addison had chosen to quote a couplet from his translation of Boileau in preference to another from a poem on the battle of Ramillies, which he himself thought better of. But the fact seems to have been overlooked that Dennis had other grounds for resentment. In the 40th number of the *Spectator* the writer speaks of "a ridiculous doctrine of modern criticism, that they (tragic writers) are obliged to an equal distribution of rewards and punishments, and an impartial execution of poetical justice." This was a plain stroke at Dennis, who was a well-known advocate of the doctrine; and a considerable portion of the critic's gall was therefore expended on Addison's violation of the supposed rule in *Cato*.

Looking at *Cato* from Voltaire's point of view—which was Addison's own—and having regard to the spirit of elegance infused through every part of it, there is much to admire in the play. It is full of pointed sentences, such as—

"'Tis not in mortals to command success,  
But we'll do more, Sempronius, we'll deserve it."

It has also many fine descriptive passages, the best of which, perhaps, occurs in the dialogue between Syphax and Juba respecting civilised and barbarian virtues :

“Believe me, prince, there’s not an African  
That traverses our vast Numidian deserts  
In quest of prey, and lives upon his bow,  
But better practises these boasted virtues.  
Coarse are his meals, the fortune of the chase ;  
Amidst the running streams he slakes his thirst,  
Toils all the day, and at th’ approach of night  
On the first friendly bank he throws him down,  
Or rests his head upon a rock till morn—  
Then rises fresh, pursues his wonted game,  
And if the following day he chance to find  
A new repast, or an untasted spring,  
Blesses his stars, and thinks it luxury.”

But in all those parts of the poem where action and not ornament is demanded, we seem to perceive the work of a poet who was constantly thinking of what his characters ought to say in the situation, rather than of one who was actually living with them in the situation itself. Take Sempronius’ speech to Syphax, describing the horrors of the conspirator’s position :

“Remember, Syphax, we must work in haste :  
Oh think what anxious moments pass between  
The birth of plots and their last fatal period.  
Oh ! ’tis a dreadful interval of time,  
Filled up with horror all, and big with death !  
Destruction hangs on every word we speak,  
On every thought, till the concluding stroke  
Determines all, and closes our design.”

Compare with this the language of real tragedy, the soliloquy of Brutus in *Julius Cæsar*, on which Addison apparently meant to improve :

“Since Cassius first did whet me against Cæsar  
I have not slept.  
Between the acting of a dreadful thing  
And the first motion, all the interim is  
Like a phantasma, or a hideous dream:  
The genius and the mortal instruments  
Are then in council; and the state of man,  
Like to a little kingdom, suffers then  
The nature of an insurrection.”

These two passages are good examples of the French and English ideals of dramatic diction, though the lines from *Cato* are more figurative than is usual in that play. Addison deliberately aimed at this French manner. “I must observe,” says he, “that when our thoughts are great and just they are often obscured by the sounding phrases, hard metaphors, and forced expressions in which they are clothed. Shakespeare is often very faulty in this particular.”<sup>1</sup> Certainly he is; but who does not see that, in spite of his metaphoric style, the speech of Brutus just quoted is far simpler and more natural than the elegant “correctness” of Sempronius.

<sup>1</sup> *Spectator*, No. 39.

## CHAPTER VII.

### ADDISON'S QUARREL WITH POPE.

It has been said that with *Cato* the good fortune of Addison reached its climax. After his triumph in the theatre, though he filled great offices in the State and wedded "a noble wife," his political success was marred by disagreements with one of his oldest friends; while with the Countess of Warwick, if we are to believe Pope, he "married discord." Added to which he was unlucky enough to incur the enmity of the most poignant and vindictive of satiric poets, and a certain shadow has been for ever thrown over his character by the famous verses on "Atticus." It will be convenient in this chapter to investigate, as far as is possible, the truth as to the quarrel between Pope and Addison. The latter has hitherto been at a certain disadvantage with the public, since the facts of the case were entirely furnished by Pope, and, though his account was dissected with great acuteness by Blackstone in the *Biographia Britannica*, the partizans of the poet were still able to plead that his uncontradicted statements could not be disposed of by mere considerations of probability.

Pope's account of his final rupture with Addison is reported by Spence as follows: "Philips seems to have been encouraged to abuse me in coffee-houses and conversations. Gildon wrote a thing about Wycherley in which

he had abused both me and my relations very grossly. Lord Warwick himself told me one day 'that it was in vain for me to endeavour to be well with Mr. Addison; that his jealous temper would never admit of a settled friendship between us; and, to convince me of what he had said, assured me that Addison had encouraged Gildon to publish those scandals, and had given him ten guineas after they were published.' The next day, while I was heated with what I had heard, I wrote a letter to Mr. Addison to let him know 'that I was not unacquainted with this behaviour of his; that, if I was to speak severely of him in return for it, it should not be in such a dirty way; that I would rather tell him himself fairly of his faults and allow his good qualities; and that it should be something in the following manner.' I then subjoined the first sketch of what has since been called my satire on Addison. He used me very civilly ever after; and never did me any injustice, that I know of, from that time to his death, which was about three years after."<sup>1</sup>

Such was the story told by Pope in his own defence against the charge that he had written and circulated the lines on Addison after the latter's death. In confirmation of his evidence, and in proof of his own good feeling for and open dealing with Addison, he inserted in the so-called authorised edition of his correspondence in 1737 several letters written apparently to Addison, while in what he pretended to be the surreptitious edition of 1735 appeared a letter to Craggs, written in July, 1715, which, as it contained many of the phrases and expressions used in the character of Atticus, created an impression in the mind of the public that both letter and verses were written about the same time. No suspicion as to the genuineness of this

<sup>1</sup> Spence's *Anecdotes*, pp. 148, 149.

correspondence was raised till the discovery of the Caryll letters, which first revealed the fact that most of the pretended letters to Addison had been really addressed to Caryll; that there had been, in fact, no correspondence between Pope and Addison; and that, therefore, in all probability, the letter to Craggs was also a fictitious composition, inserted in the so-called surreptitious volume of 1735 to establish the credit of Pope's own story.

We must accordingly put aside, as undeserving of credence, the poet's ingeniously constructed charge, at any rate in the particular shape in which it is preferred, and must endeavour to form for ourselves such a judgment as is rendered probable by the acknowledged facts of the case. What is indisputable is that in 1715 a rupture took place between Addison and Pope, in consequence of the injury which the translator of the *Iliad* conceived himself to have suffered from the countenance given to Tickell's rival performance; and that in 1723 we find the first mention of the satire upon Addison in a letter from Atterbury to Pope. The question is, what blame attaches to Addison for his conduct in the matter of the two translations; and what is the amount of truth in Pope's story respecting the composition of the verses on Atticus.

Pope made Addison's acquaintance in the year 1712. On the 20th of December, 1711, Addison had noticed Pope's *Art of Criticism* in the 253d number of the *Spectator*—partly, no doubt, in consequence of his perception of the merits of the poem, but probably at the particular instigation of Steele, whose acquaintance with Pope may have been due to the common friendship of both with Caryll. The praise bestowed on the *Essay* (as it was afterwards called) was of the finest and most liberal kind, and was the more welcome because it was preceded by a censure

conveyed with admirable delicacy on "the strokes of ill-nature" which the poem contained. Pope was naturally exceedingly pleased, and wrote to Steele a letter of thanks under the impression that the latter was the writer of the paper, a misapprehension which Steele at once hastened to correct. "The paper," says he, "was written by one with whom I will make you acquainted—which is the best return I can make to you for your favour."

These words were doubtless used by Steele in the warmth of his affection for Addison, but they also express the general estimation in which the latter was then held. He had recently established his man Button in a coffee-house in Covent Garden, where, surrounded by his little senate, Budgell, Tickell, Carey, and Philips, he ruled supreme over the world of taste and letters. Something, no doubt, of the spirit of the coterie pervaded the select assembly. Addison could always find a word of condescending praise for his followers in the pages of the *Spectator*; he corrected their plays and mended their prologues; and they on their side paid back their patron with unbounded reverence, perhaps justifying the satirical allusion of the poet to the "applause" so grateful to the ear of Atticus:

"While wits and Templars every sentence raise,  
And wonder with a foolish face of praise."

Pope, according to his own account, was admitted to the society, and left it, as he said, because he found it sit too far into the night for his health. It may, however, be suspected that the natures of the author of the *Dunciad* and of the creator of Sir Roger de Coverley, though touching each other at many points, were far from naturally congenial; that the essayist was well aware that the man who could write the *Essay on Criticism* had a higher



capacity for poetry than either himself or any of his followers; and that the poet, on his side, conscious of great if undeveloped powers, was inclined to resent the air of patronage with which he was treated by the King of Button's. Certain it is that the praise of Pope by Addison in number 253 of the *Spectator* is qualified (though by no means unjustly), and that he is not spoken of with the same warmth as Tickell and Ambrose Philips in number 523. "Addison," said Pope to Spence, "seemed to value himself more upon his poetry than upon his prose, though he wrote the latter with such particular ease, fluency, and happiness."<sup>1</sup> This often happens; and perhaps the uneasy consciousness that, in spite of the reputation which his *Campaign* had secured for him, he was really inferior to such men as John Philips and Tickell, made Addison touchy at the idea of the entire circle being outshone by a new candidate for poetical fame.

Whatever jealousy, however, existed between the two was carefully suppressed during the first year of their acquaintance. Pope showed Addison the first draft of the *Rape of the Lock*, and, according to Warburton (whose account must be received with suspicion), imparted to him his design of adding the fairy machinery. If Addison really endeavoured to dissuade the poet from making this exquisite addition, the latter was on his side anxious that *Cato*, which, as has been said, was shown to him after its completion, should not be presented on the stage; and his advice, if tested by the result, would have been quite as open as Addison's to an unfavourable construction. He wrote, however, for the play the famous Prologue which Steele inserted, with many compliments, in the *Guardian*. But not long afterwards the effect of the

<sup>1</sup> Spence's *Anecdotes*, p. 257.

compliments was spoiled by the comparatively cold mention of Pope's *Pastorals* in the same paper that contained a glowing panegyric on the *Pastorals* of Ambrose Philips. In revenge, Pope wrote his paper commending Philips' performance and depreciating his own, the irony of which, it is said, escaping the notice of Steele, was inserted by him in the *Guardian*, much to the amusement of Addison and more to the disgust of Philips.

The occasion on which Pope's pique against Addison began to develop into bitter resentment is sufficiently indicated by the date which the poet assigns to the first letter in the concocted correspondence—viz., July 20, 1713. This letter (which is taken, with a few slight alterations of names, from one written to Caryl on November 19, 1712) opens as follows :

“I am more joyed at your return than I should be at that of the sun, so much as I wish for him this melancholy wet season ; but it has a fate too like yours to be displeasing to owls and obscure animals who cannot bear his lustre. What puts me in mind of these night-birds was John Dennis, whom I think you are best revenged upon, as the sun was in the fable upon those bats and beastly birds above mentioned, only by shining on. I am so far from esteeming it any misfortune, that I congratulate you upon having your share in that which all the great men and all the good men that ever lived have had their part of—envy and calumny. To be uncensured and to be obscure is the same thing. You may conclude from what I here say that it was never in my thoughts to have offered you my pen in any direct reply to such a critic, but only in some little raillery, not in defence of you, but in contempt of him.”

The allusion is to the squib called *Dr. Norris' Narrative of the Frenzy of John Dennis*, which, it appears, was shown to Addison by Pope before its appearance, and after the publication of which Addison caused Steele to write to Lintot in the following terms :

“Mr. Lintot,—Mr. Addison desired me to tell you that he wholly disapproves the manner of treating Mr. Dennis in a little pamphlet by way of Mr. Norris’ account. When he thinks fit to take notice of Mr. Dennis’ objections to his writings, he will do it in a way Mr. Dennis shall have no just reason to complain of. But when the papers above mentioned were offered to be communicated to him he said he could not, either in honour or conscience, be privy to such a treatment, and was sorry to hear of it.—I am, sir, your very humble servant.”

Pope’s motive in writing the pamphlet was, as Johnson says, “to give his resentment full play without appearing to revenge himself” for the attack which Dennis had made on his own poems. Addison doubtless divined the truth; but the wording of the letter which he caused a third person to write to Lintot certainly seems studiously offensive to Pope, who had, professedly at any rate, placed his pen at his service, and who had connected his own name with *Cato* by the fine Prologue he had written in its praise. Lintot would of course have shown Pope Steele’s letter, and we may be sure that the lofty tone taken by Addison in speaking of the pamphlet would have rankled bitterly in the poet’s mind.

At the same time Philips, who was naturally enraged with Pope on account of the ridicule with which the latter had covered his *Pastorals*, endeavoured to widen the breach by spreading a report that Pope had entered into a conspiracy to write against the Whigs, and to undermine the reputation of Addison. Addison seems to have lent a ready ear to these accusations. At any rate Pope thought so; for when the good-natured painter Jervas sought to bring about a composition, he wrote to him (27th August, 1714):

“What you mentioned of the friendly office you endeavoured to do betwixt Mr. Addison and me deserves acknowledgment on my

part. You thoroughly know my regard to his character, and my propensity to testify it by all ways in my power. You as thoroughly know the scandalous meanness of that proceeding, which was used by Philips, to make a man I so highly value suspect my disposition towards him. But as, after all, Mr. Addison must be the judge in what regards himself, and has seemed to be no very just one to me, so I must own to you I expect nothing but civility from him, how much soever I wish for his friendship. As for any offices of real kindness or service which it is in his power to do me, I should be ashamed to receive them from any man who had no better opinion of my morals than to think me a party man, nor of my temper than to believe me capable of maligning or envying another's reputation as a poet. So I leave it to time to convince him as to both, to show him the shallow depths of those half-witted creatures who misinformed him, and to prove that I am incapable of endeavouring to lessen a person whom I would be proud to imitate, and therefore ashamed to flatter. In a word, Mr. Addison is sure of my respect at all times, and of my real friendship whenever he shall think fit to know me for what I am."

It is evident, from the tone of this letter, that all the materials for a violent quarrel were in existence. On the one side was Addison, with probably an instinctive dislike of Pope's character, intensified by the injurious reports circulated against Pope in the "little senate" at Button's; with a nature somewhat cold and reserved; and with something of literary jealousy, partly arising from a sense of what was due to his acknowledged supremacy, and partly from a perception that there had appeared a very formidable "brother near the throne." On the side of Pope there was an eager sensitiveness, ever craving for recognition and praise, with an abnormal irritability prone to watch for, and reluctant to forgive, anything in the shape of a slight or an injury. Slightings and injuries he already deemed himself to have received, and accordingly, when Tickell, in 1715, published his translation of the First Book of the

*Iliad* at the same time with his own translation of the first four books, his smothered resentment broke into a blaze at what he imagined to be a conspiracy to damage his poetical reputation. Many years afterwards, when the quarrel between Addison and himself had become notorious, he arranged his version of it for the public in a manner which is, indeed, far from assisting us to a knowledge of the truth, but which enables us to understand very clearly what was passing in his own mind at the time.

The subscription for Pope's translation of the *Iliad* was set on foot in November, 1713. On the 10th October, 1714, having two books completed, he wished to submit them—or at any rate he told the public so in 1735—to Addison's judgment. This was at a date when, as he informed Spence, "there had been a coldness between Mr. Addison and me" for some time. According to the letter which appears in his published correspondence, he wrote to Addison on the subject as follows:

"I have been acquainted by one of my friends, who omits no opportunities of gratifying me, that you have lately been pleased to speak of me in a manner which nothing but the real respect I have for you can deserve. May I hope that some late malevolences have lost their effect? . . . As to what you have said of me I shall never believe that the author of *Cato* can speak one thing and think another. As a proof that I account you sincere, I beg a favour of you: it is that you would look over the two first books of my translation of Homer, which are in the hands of Lord Halifax. I am sensible how much the reputation of any poetical work will depend upon the character you give it. It is therefore some evidence of the trust I repose in your good will when I give you this opportunity of speaking ill of me with justice, and yet expect you will tell me your truest thoughts at the same time you tell others your most favourable ones."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Pope's *Works*, Elwin and Courthope's edition, vol. vi. p. 408.

Whether the facts reported in this letter were as fictitious as we have a right to assume the letter itself to be, it is impossible to say; Pope at any rate told Spence the following story, which is clearly meant to fall in with the evidence of the correspondence:

“On his meeting me there (Button’s Coffee-House) he took me aside and said he should be glad to dine with me at such a tavern if I would stay till those people (Budgell and Philips) were gone. We went accordingly, and after dinner Mr. Addison said ‘that he had wanted for some time to talk with me: that his friend Tickell had formerly, while at Oxford, translated the first book of the *Iliad*. That he now designed to print it, and had desired him to look it over: he must therefore beg that I would not desire him to look over my first book, because, if he did, it would have the air of double dealing.’ I assured him that I did not take it ill of Mr. Tickell that he was going to publish his translation; that he certainly had as much right to translate any author as myself; and that publishing both was entering on a fair stage. I then added ‘that I would not desire him to look over my first book of the *Iliad*, because he had looked over Mr. Tickell’s, but could wish to have the benefit of his observations on my second, which I had then finished, and which Mr. Tickell had not touched upon.’ Accordingly, I sent him the second book the next morning; and in a few days he returned it with very high commendation. Soon after it was generally known that Mr. Tickell was publishing the first book of the *Iliad* I met Dr. Young in the street, and, upon our falling into that subject, the doctor expressed a great deal of surprise at Tickell’s having such a translation by him so long. He said that it was inconceivable to him, and that there must be some mistake in the matter; that he and Tickell were so intimately acquainted at Oxford that each used to communicate to the other whatever verses they wrote, even to the least things; that Tickell could not have been busied in so long a work there without his knowing something of the matter; and that he had never heard a single word of it till this occasion.”<sup>1</sup>

It is scarcely necessary to say that, after the light that

<sup>1</sup> Spence’s *Anecdotes*, p. 146.

has been thrown on Pope's character by the detection of the frauds he practised in the publication of his correspondence, it is impossible to give any credence to the tales he poured into Spence's ear, tending to blacken Addison's character and to exalt his own. Tickell's MS. of the translation is in existence, and all the evidence tends to show that he was really the author of it. But the above statement may be taken to reflect accurately enough the rage, the resentment, and the suspicion which disturbed Pope's own mind on the appearance of the rival translation. We can scarcely doubt that it was this, and this alone, which roused him to such glowing indignation and inspired him to write the character of Atticus. When the verses were made public, after Addison's death, he probably perceived that the public would not consider the evidence for Addison's collusion with Tickell to be sufficiently strong to afford a justification for the bitterness of the satire. It was necessary to advance some stronger plea for such retaliation, especially as rumour confidently asserted that the lines had not been written till after Addison was dead. Hence the story told by Pope to Spence, proving first that the lines were not only written during Addison's lifetime, but were actually sent to Addison himself; and secondly, that they were only composed after the strongest evidence had been afforded to the poet of his rival's malignant disposition towards him. Hence, too, the publication in 1735 of the letter to Craggs, which, containing as it did many of the phrases and metaphors employed in the verses, seemed to supply indirect evidence that both were written about the same period.

With regard to Pope's story, it is not too much to say that it entirely breaks down on examination. He professes to give it on the authority of Lord Warwick himself, reck-

oning, of course, that the evidence of Addison's own stepson would be conclusive with the public. But Addison was not married to the Countess of Warwick till August, 1716; and in the previous May he had bestowed the most liberal praise on Pope's translation in one of his papers in the *Freeholder*. For Lord Warwick, therefore, to argue at that date that Addison's "*jealous temper* could never admit of a settled friendship" between him and Pope was out of the question. If, on the other hand, Lord Warwick told his story to Pope before his mother's marriage, the difficulty is equally great. The letter to Craggs, which, if it was ever sent to the latter at all, must obviously have been written in the same "heat" which prompted the satire on Atticus, is dated July 15, 1715. This fits in well enough with the date of the dispute about the rival translations of the *Iliad*, but not with Lord Warwick's story, for Wycherley, after whose death Gildon, we are told, was hired by Addison to abuse Pope, did not die till the December of that year.

Again, the internal evidence of the character itself points to the fact that, when it was first composed, its "heat" was not caused by any information the poet had received of a transaction between Addison and Gildon. The following is the first published version of the satire:

"If Dennis writes and rails in furious pet  
I'll answer Dennis when I am in debt.  
If meagre Gildon draw his meaner quill,  
I wish the man a dinner and sit still.  
But should there *One* whose better stars conspire  
To form a bard, and raise a genius higher,  
Blest with each talent and each art to please,  
And born to live, converse, and write with ease;  
Should such a one, resolved to reign alone,  
Bear, like the Turk, no brother near the throne,



View him with jealous yet with scornful eyes,  
 Hate him for arts that caused himself to rise,  
 Damn with faint praise, assent with civil leer,  
 And without sneering teach the rest to sneer;  
 Alike reserved to blame or to commend,  
 A timorous foe and a suspicious friend,  
 Fearing e'en fools, by flatterers besieged,  
 And so obliging that he ne'er obliged;  
 Willing to wound, and yet afraid to strike,  
 Just hint the fault, and hesitate dislike,  
*Who when two wits on rival themes contest,  
 Approves of both, but likes the worst the best:*  
 Like Cato, give his little senate laws  
 And sits attentive to his own applause;  
 While wits and templars every sentence praise  
 And wonder with a foolish face of praise:  
 Who would not laugh if such a man there be?  
 Who would not weep if Addison were he?"

There is sufficient corroborative evidence to allow us to believe that these lines were actually written, as Pope says, during Addison's lifetime; and if they were, the character of the satire would naturally suggest that its motive was Addison's supposed conduct in the matter of the two translations of the *Iliad*. There is nothing in them to indicate any connection in the poet's mind between Gildon and Addison; on the other hand, the allusion to the "two wits" shows the special grievance that formed the basis, in his imagination, of the whole character. Afterwards we find that "meaner quill" is replaced by "venal quill;" and the couplet about the rival translations is suppressed. The inference is plain. When Pope was charged with having written the character after Addison's death, he found himself obliged, in self-defence, to furnish a moral justification for the satire; and, after his own unfortunate manner, he proceeded to build up for himself a

position on a number of systematic falsehoods. His story was probably so far true that the character was really written while Addison was alive; on the other hand, it is not unreasonable to conclude that the entire statement about Gildon and Lord Warwick is fabulous; and, as the assertion that the lines were sent to Addison immediately after their composition is associated with these myths, this, too, may fairly be dismissed as equally undeserving of belief.

As to the truth of the character of Atticus, however, it by no means follows, because Pope's account of its origin is false, that the portrait itself is altogether untrue. The partizans of Addison endeavour to prove that it is throughout malicious and unjust. But no one can fail to perceive that the character itself is a very extraordinary picture of human nature; and there is no reason to suppose that Addison was superior to the weaknesses of his kind. On the contrary, there is independent evidence to show that he was strongly influenced by that literary jealousy which makes the groundwork of the ideal character. This the piercing intelligence of Pope no doubt plainly discerned; his inflamed imagination built up on this foundation the wonderful fabric that has ever since continued to enchant the world. The reader who is acquainted with his own heart will probably not find much difficulty in determining what elements in the character are derived from the substantial truth of nature, and what are to be ascribed to the exaggerated perceptions of Genius.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE LAST YEARS OF HIS LIFE.

THE representation of *Cato* on the stage was a turning point in the political fortunes of the Whigs. In the same month the Queen announced, on the meeting of Parliament, the signature of the Treaty of Utrecht. Whatever were the merits or demerits of the policy embodied in this instrument, it offered many points of attack to a compact and vigorous Opposition. The most salient of these was, perhaps, the alleged sacrifice of British commercial interests through the incompetence or corruption of the negotiators, and on this question the Whigs accordingly raised vehement and reiterated debates. Addison aided his political friends with an ingenious pamphlet on the subject, called *The late Trial and Conviction of Count Tariff*, containing a narrative of the lawsuit between the Count and Goodman Fact, which is written with much spirit and pleasantry. It is said that he also took the field in answer to the Address to the Queen from the magistrates of Dunkirk, wherein Her Majesty was requested to waive the execution of the article in the Treaty providing for the demolition of the harbour and fortifications of that town; but if he wrote on the subject the pamphlet has not been preserved by Tickell. His old friend Steele was meanwhile involving himself in difficulties through the heat

and impetuosity of his party passions. After the painful abstinence from partizanship imposed on him by the scheme of the *Tatler* and *Spectator* he had founded the *Guardian* on similar lines, and had carried it on in a non-political spirit up to the 128th number, when his Whig feelings could restrain themselves no longer, and he inserted a letter signed by "An English Tory," demanding the immediate demolition of Dunkirk. Soon afterwards he published a pamphlet called *The Crisis*, to excite the apprehensions of the nation with regard to the Protestant succession, and, dropping the *Guardian*, started the *Englishman*, a political paper of extreme Whig views. He further irritated the Tory majority in Parliament by supporting the proposal of Sir Thomas Hanmer, as Speaker of the House of Commons, in a speech violently reflecting on the rejected Bill for a Treaty of Commerce with France. A complaint was brought before the House against the *Crisis*, and two numbers of the *Englishman*, and Steele was ordered to attend and answer for his conduct. After the charge had been preferred against him, he asked for time to arrange his defence; and this being granted him, after a warm debate, he reappeared in his place a few days later, and made a long and able speech, which is said to have been prepared for him by Addison, acting under the instructions of the Kit-Kat Club. It did not, however, save him from being expelled from the House.

Addison himself stood aloof, as far as was possible, from the heated atmosphere of party, occupying his time chiefly with the execution of literary designs. In 1713 he began a work on the Evidences of Christianity, which he never finished, and in the last half of the year 1714 he completed the eighth volume of the *Spectator*. So moderate was his political attitude that Bolingbroke was not with-

out hopes of bringing him over to the Tory side; an interview, however, convinced him that it was useless to dream of converting Addison's steady constitutional principle to his own ambitious schemes.

The condition of the Tory party was indeed rapidly becoming desperate. Its leaders were at open variance with each other. Oxford, a veteran intriguer, was desirous of combining with the Whigs; the more daring and brilliant Bolingbroke aimed at the restoration of the exiled Stuarts. His influence, joined to natural family affection, prevailed with the Queen, who was persuaded to deprive Oxford of the Treasurer's staff. But her health was undermined, and a furious and indecent dispute between the two Tory leaders in her own presence completely prostrated her. She was carried from the Council, and sinking into a state of unconsciousness from which she never recovered, died on the 1st of August, 1714.

Meantime the Whigs were united and prepared. On the meeting of the Council, George I. was proclaimed King without opposition: Lord-Justices were authorised to administer affairs provisionally, and Addison was appointed their Secretary. It is said, though on no good authority, that having, in discharge of his office, to announce to George I. the death of the Queen, Addison was embarrassed in his choice of phrases for the occasion, and that the duty to which the best writer in the *Spectator* proved unequal was performed by a common clerk. Had Addison been quite unfamiliar with public life this story would have been more credible, but his experience in Ireland must have made him acquainted with the peculiarities of official English; and some surviving specimens of his public correspondence prove him to have been a sufficient master in the art of saying nothing in a magnificent way.

On the arrival of the King in England, the Earl of Sunderland was appointed to succeed the Duke of Shrewsbury as Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland, and he once more offered Addison the post of Chief Secretary. In that office the latter continued till the Earl's resignation of the Lord-Lieutenancy in August, 1715. It would appear to have been less lucrative to him than when he previously held it, and, indeed, than he himself had expected; the cause of this deficiency being, as he states, "his Lordship's absence from that kingdom, and his not being qualified to give out military commissions."<sup>1</sup> He is said, nevertheless, to have shown the strictest probity and honour in his official dealings, and some of his extant correspondence (the authenticity of which, however, is guaranteed only by the unsatisfactory testimony of Curl) shows him to have declined, in a very high-minded manner, a present of money, evidently intended to secure his interest on behalf of an applicant. He seems to have been in London almost as much as in Dublin during his tenure of office, and he found time in the midst of his public business to compose another play for the stage.

There appears to be no good reason for doubting that *The Drummer* was the work of Addison. It is true that it was not included by Tickell in his edition of his friend's writings; and Steele, in the letter to Congreve which he prefixed to the second edition of the play, only says that Addison sent for him when he was a patentee of Drury Lane Theatre, and told him "that a gentleman then in the room had written a play which he was sure I should like, but it was to be a secret; and he knew I would take as much pains, since he recommended it, as I would for him." But Steele could, under such circum-

<sup>1</sup> Addison's Memorial to the King.

stances, hardly have been deceived as to the real authorship of the play, and if confirmatory evidence is required, it is furnished by Theobald, who tells us that Addison informed him that he had taken the character of Vellum, the steward, from Fletcher's *Scornful Lady*. Addison was probably not anxious himself to assert his right of paternity to the play. It was acted at Drury Lane, and, the name of the author being unknown, was coldly received; a second performance of it after Addison's death, when the authorship was proclaimed, was naturally more successful; but, in fact, the piece is, like *Cato*, a standing proof of Addison's deficiency in dramatic genius. The plot is poor and trivial; nor does the dialogue, though it shows in many passages traces of its author's peculiar vein of humour, make amends by its brilliancy for the tameness of the dramatic situation.

He was soon, however, called upon to employ his pen on a task better suited to his powers. In September, 1715, there was a rising in Scotland and in the North of England on behalf of the Pretender. The rebellion was put down with little difficulty, but the position of the House of Brunswick was far more precarious than on the surface it seemed to be. It could count, no doubt, on the loyalty of a House of Commons elected when the Tories were momentarily stunned by the death of Queen Anne, on the faith of the army, and on the support of the moneyed interest. On the other hand, the two most important classes in the kingdom—the landed proprietors and the clergy—were generally hostile to the new *régime*, and the influence exercised by the latter was of course exceedingly great in days when the pulpit was still the chief instrument in the formation of public opinion. The weight of some powerful writer was urgently needed on the Whig

side, and Addison—who in the preceding August had been obliged to vacate his office of Secretary in consequence of the resignation of the Lord-Lieutenant—was by common consent indicated as the man best qualified for the task. There were indeed hot political partizans who questioned his capacity. Steele said that “the Government had made choice of a lute when they ought to have taken a trumpet.” But if by the “trumpet” he was modestly alluding to himself, it may very well be doubted if the objects of the Government would have been attained by employing the services of the author of the *Englishman*. What was wanted was not party invective, but the calm persuasiveness of reason; a pen that could *prove* to all Tory country gentlemen and thoroughgoing High Churchmen that the Protestant succession was indispensable to the safety of the principles which each respectively considered to be of vital importance. This was the task which lay before Addison, and which he accomplished with consummate skill in the *Freeholder*.

The name of the new paper was selected by him in order to suggest that property was the basis of liberty; and his main argument, which he introduces under constantly varying forms, is that there could be no safety for property under a line of monarchs who claimed the dispensing power, and no security for the liberties of the Church under kings of an alien religion. In order to secure variety of treatment, the exact social position of the *Freeholder* is not defined:

“At the same time that I declare I am a freeholder I do not exclude myself from any other title. A freeholder may be either a voter or a knight of the shire, a wit or a fox-hunter, a scholar or a soldier, an alderman or a courtier, a patriot or a stock-jobber. But I choose to be distinguished by this denomination, as the freeholder



is the basis of all other titles. Dignities may be grafted upon it, but this is the substantial stock that conveys to them their life, taste, and beauty, and without which they are blossoms that would fall away with every shake of wind."<sup>1</sup>

By this means he was able to impart liveliness to his theme, which he diversifies by philosophical disquisition; by good-natured satire on the prejudices of the country gentlemen; by frequent papers on his favourite subject, "the fair sex;" and by occasional glances at literature. Though his avowed object was to prove the superiority of the Whig over the Tory theory of the Constitution, his "native moderation" never deserts him, and he often lets his disgust at the stupidity of faction, and his preference for social over political writing, appear in the midst of his argument. The best papers in the series are undoubtedly the "Memoirs of a Preston Rebel" and the "Tory Fox-hunter," both of which are full of the exquisite humour that distinguishes the sketches of Sir Roger de Coverley. The *Freeholder* was only continued for six months (December 23, 1715, to June 9, 1716), being published every Friday and Monday, and being completed in fifty-five numbers. In the last number the essayist described the nature of his work, and gave his reasons for discontinuing it:

"It would not be difficult to continue a paper of this kind if one were disposed to resume the same subjects and weary out the reader with the same thoughts in a different phrase, or to ramble through the cause of Whig and Tory without any certain aim or method in every particular discourse. Such a practice in political writers is like that of some preachers taken notice of by Dr. South, who, being prepared only upon two or three points of doctrine, run the same round with their audience from one end of the year to the other, and are always forced to tell them, by way of preface, 'These are par-

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<sup>1</sup> *Freeholder*, No. 1.

ticalars of so great importance that they cannot be sufficiently inculcated.' To avoid this method of tautology, I have endeavoured to make every paper a distinct essay upon some particular subject, without deviating into points foreign to the tenor of each discourse. They are, indeed, most of them essays upon Government, but with a view to the present situation of affairs in Great Britain, so that, if they have the good fortune to live longer than works of this nature generally do, future readers may see in them the complexion of the times in which they were written. However, as there is no employment so irksome as that of transcribing out of one's self next to that of transcribing out of others, I shall let drop the work, since there do not occur to me any material points arising from our present situation which I have not already touched upon."

It was probably in reward for his services in publishing the *Freeholder* that he was made one of the Commissioners for Trade and Colonies. Soon after his appointment to this office he married Charlotte, Countess of Warwick, daughter of Sir Thomas Myddleton, of Chirk Castle, Denbighshire. His attachment to the Countess is said to have begun years before; and this seems not unlikely, for, though the story of his having been tutor to the young Earl is obviously groundless, two charming letters of his to the latter are in existence which show that as early as 1708 he took a strong interest in the family. These letters, which are written entirely on the subject of birds, may, of course, have been inspired merely by an affection for the boy himself; but it is not unreasonable to suppose that the writer felt a yet stronger interest in the mother, though her indifference, or his natural diffidence, led him to disguise his feelings; perhaps, indeed, the episode of Sir Roger de Coverley's love passage with the cruel widow may be founded on personal experience. We have seen him in 1711 reporting to a friend that the loss of his place had involved that of his mistress. Possibly the same

hard-hearted mistress condescended to relent when she saw her former lover once more on the road to high State preferment.

Report says that the marriage was not a happy one. The tradition, however, like so many others about the same person, seems to have been derived from Pope, who, in his *Epistle to Arbuthnot*, congratulates himself—with an evident glance at Addison—on “not marrying discord with a noble wife.” An innuendo of this kind, and coming from such a quarter, ought not to be accepted as evidence without some corroboration; and the only corroboration which is forthcoming is a letter of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, who writes from Constantinople in 1717: “I received the news of Mr. Addison’s being declared Secretary of State with the less surprise in that I know the post was offered to him before. At that time he declined it; and I really believe he would have done well to decline it now. Such a post as that and such a wife as the Countess do not seem to be, in prudence, eligible for a man that is asthmatic, and we may see the day when he will be glad to resign them both.” Lady Mary, however, does not hint that Addison was *then* living unhappily with his wife; her expressions seem to be inspired rather by her own sharp wit and a personal dislike of the Countess than by any knowledge of discord in the household. On the other hand, Addison speaks of his wife in a way which is scarcely consistent with what Johnson calls “uncontradicted report.” On March 20th, 1718, he writes to Swift: “Whenever you see England your company will be the most acceptable in the world at Holland House, where you are highly esteemed by Lady Warwick and the young Lord.” A henpecked husband would hardly have invited the Dean of St. Patrick’s to be the witness of his domestic discom-

fort. Nor do the terms of his will, dated only a month before his death, indicate that he regarded his wife with feelings other than those of affection and respect: "I do make and ordain my said dear wife executrix of this my last will; and I do appoint her to be guardian of my dear child, Charlotte Addison, until she shall attain her age of one-and-twenty, being well assured that she will take due care of her education, and provide for her in case she live to be married." On the whole, it seems reasonable to put positive evidence of this kind against those vague rumours of domestic unhappiness which, however unsubstantial, are so easily propagated and so readily believed.

In April, 1717, the dissensions between the two sections of the Whig Cabinet, led respectively by Townshend and Sunderland, reached a climax, and Townshend being worsted, Sunderland became Prime Minister. He at once appointed his old subordinate one of the Secretaries of State, and Addison filled the office for eleven months. "It is universally confessed," says Johnson, "that he was unequal to the duties of his place." Here again the "universal confession" dwindles on examination to something very different. As far as his conduct in administration required to be defended in Parliament, his inaptitude for the place was no doubt conspicuous. He had been elected member of Parliament for Lostwithiel in 1708, and when that election was set aside he was chosen for Malmesbury, a seat which he retained for the rest of his life. He made, however, but one effort to address the House, when, being confused with the cheers which greeted him, he was unable to complete his sentence, and, resuming his seat, never again opened his lips.

But in other respects the evidence of his official incapacity seems to proceed solely from his enemies. "Mr.

Addison," said Pope to Spence, "could not give out a common order in writing from his endeavouring always to word it too finely. He had too beautiful an imagination to make a man of business."<sup>1</sup> Copies of official letters and despatches written by Addison are, however, in existence, and prove him to have been a sufficient master of a business style, so that, though his lack of ability as a speaker may well have impaired his efficiency as a member of the Government, Johnson has little warrant for saying that "*finding by experience his own inability*, he was forced to solicit his dismissal with a pension of fifteen hundred pounds a year." As a matter of fact, Addison's own petition to the King and his private correspondence prove with sufficient clearness that his resignation was caused entirely by his failing health; while the congratulatory Latin verses addressed to him by Vincent Bourne, on his recovery from one of his seizures of asthma, show that his illness was of the most serious nature.

He resigned his post, however, in March, 1718, with cheerful alacrity, and appears to have looked forward to an active period of literary work, for we are told that he meditated a tragedy on the death of Socrates, as well as the completion of his book on the Evidences of Christianity. But this was not to be; the exigencies of the Ministry in the following year demanded the services of his pen. A Peerage Bill, introduced by Sunderland, the effect of which was to cause the sovereign to divest himself of his prerogative of creating fresh peers, had been vehemently attacked by Steele in a pamphlet called the *Plebeian*, published March 14, 1719, which Addison undertook to answer in the *Old Whig* (March 19). The *Plebeian* returned to the attack with spirit and with some acrimony in two

<sup>1</sup> Spence's *Anecdotes*, p. 175.

numbers published March 29th and 30th, and the *Old Whig* made a somewhat contemptuous reply on April 2d. "Every reader," says Johnson, "surely must regret that these two illustrious friends, after so many years passed in confidence and endearment, in unity of interest, conformity of opinion, and fellowship of study, should finally part in acrimonious opposition. Such a controversy was 'Bel-lum plusquam civile,' as Lucan expresses it. Why could not faction find other advocates? But among the uncertainties of the human state we are doomed to number the instability of friendship."

The rupture seems the more painful when we find Steele, in his third and last *Plebeian*, published April 6th, taunting his opponent with his tardiness in taking the field, at the very moment when his former friend and school-fellow—unknown to him of course—was dying. Asthma, the old enemy that had driven Addison from office, had returned; dropsy supervened, and he died, 17th June, 1719, at Holland House, at the early age of forty-seven. We may imagine the grief, contrition, and remorse that must have torn the affectionate heart of Steele when he had found he had been vexing the last hours of one whom, in spite of all their differences, he loved so well. He had always regarded Addison with almost religious reverence, which did not yield even to acts of severity on his friend's part that would have estranged the feelings of men of a disposition less simple and impulsive. Addison had once lent him £1000 to build a house at Hampton Court, instructing his lawyer to recover the amount when due. On Steele's failure to repay the money, his friend ordered the house and furniture to be sold and the balance to be paid to Steele, writing to him at the same time that he had taken the step to arouse him from his lethargy. B. Vic-

tor, the actor, a friend of Steele, who is the authority for the story, says that Steele accepted the reproof with "philosophical composure," and that the incident caused no diminution in their friendship. Political differences at last produced a coldness between them, and in 1717 Steele writes to his wife, "I ask no favour of Mr. Secretary Addison." Great must have been the revulsion of feeling in a man of his nature when he learned that death had now rendered impossible the renewal of the old associations. All the love, admiration, and enthusiasm for Addison, which his heart and memory still preserved, broke out in the letter to Congreve which he prefixed to *The Drummer*.

Of the closing scene of Addison's life we know little except on rumour. A report was current in Johnson's time, and reached the antiquary John Nichols at the close of the last century, that his life was shortened by over-drinking. But as usual the scandal, when traced to its source, seems to originate with Pope, who told Spence that he himself was once one of the circle at Button's, and left it because he found that their prolonged sittings were injuring his health. It is highly probable that Addison's phlegmatic temperament required to be aroused by wine into conversational activity, and that he was able to drink more than most of his companions without being affected by it; but to suppose that he indulged a sensual appetite to excess is contrary alike to all that we know of his character and to the direct evidence of Bishop Berkeley, who, writing of the first performance of *Cato*, says: "I was present with Mr. Addison and a few more friends in a side box, where we had a table and two or three flasks of Burgundy and champagne, with which the author (who is a very sober man) thought it necessary to support his spirits."

Another story, told on the same questionable authority, represents him as having sent on his death-bed for Gay, and asked his forgiveness for some injury which he said he had done him, but which he did not specify. From the more trustworthy report of Young we learn that he asked to see the Earl of Warwick, and said to him, "See in what peace a Christian can die:" words which are supposed to explain the allusion of the lines in Tickell's elegy—

"He taught us how to live and (oh! too high  
The price of knowledge) taught us how to die."

His body, after lying in state in the Jerusalem Chamber, was buried by night in Westminster Abbey. The service was performed by Atterbury, and the scene is described by Tickell in a fine passage, probably inspired by a still finer one written by his own rival and his friend's satirist :

"Can I forget the dismal night that gave  
My soul's best part for ever to the grave?  
How silent did his old companions tread,  
By midnight lamps, the mansions of the dead,  
Through breathing statues, then unheeded things,  
Through rows of warriors, and through walks of kings!  
What awe did the slow solemn march inspire,  
The pealing organ, and the pausing choir;  
The duties by the lawn-robed prelate paid,  
And the last words that dust to dust conveyed!  
While speechless o'er the closing grave we bend,  
Accept these tears, thou dear departed friend!  
Oh gone for ever; take this last adieu,  
And sleep in peace next thy loved Montague."<sup>1</sup>

He left by the Countess of Warwick one daughter, who lived in his old house at Bilton, and died unmarried in 1797.

<sup>1</sup> Tickell's *Elegy*. Compare Pope's *Eloisa to Abelard*, v. 107.



## CHAPTER IX.

### THE GENIUS OF ADDISON.

SUCH is Addison's history, which, scanty as it is, goes far towards justifying the glowing panegyric bestowed by Macaulay on "the unsullied statesman, the accomplished scholar, the consummate painter of life and manners, the great satirist who alone knew how to use ridicule without abusing it; who, without inflicting a wound, effected a great social reform; and who reconciled wit and virtue after a long and painful separation, during which wit had been led astray by profligacy, and virtue by fanaticism." It is wanting, no doubt, in romantic incident and personal interest, but the same may be said of the life of Scott; and what do we know of the personality of Homer and Shakespeare? The real life of these writers is to be found in their work; and there, too, though on a different level and in a different shape, are we to look for the character of the creator of Sir Roger de Coverley. But, while it seems possible to divine the personal tastes and feelings of Shakespeare and Scott under a hundred different ideal forms of their own invention, it is not in these that the genius of Addison most characteristically embodies itself. Did his reputation rest on *Rosamond* or *Cato* or *The Campaign*, his name would be little better known to us than any among that crowd of mediocrities who have been immortalised in

Johnson's *Lives of the Poets*. The work of Addison consisted in building up a public opinion which, in spite of its durable solidity, seems, like the great Gothic cathedrals, to absorb into itself the individuality of the architect. A vigorous effort of thought is required to perceive how strong this individuality must have been. We have to reflect on the ease with which, even in these days when the foundations of all authority are called in question, we form judgments on questions of morals, breeding, and taste, and then to dwell in imagination on the state of conflict in all matters religious, moral, and artistic, which prevailed in the period between the Restoration and the succession of the House of Hanover. To whom do we owe the comparative harmony we enjoy? Undoubtedly to the authors of the *Spectator*, and first among these, by universal consent, to Addison.

Addison's own disposition seems to have been of that rare and admirable sort which Hamlet praised in Horatio :

"Thou hast been  
As one in suffering all that suffers nothing:  
A man that Fortune's buffets and rewards  
Has ta'en with equal thanks; and blessed are those  
Whose blood and judgment are so well commingled  
That they are not a pipe for Fortune's finger  
To sound what stop she please."

These lines fittingly describe the patient serenity and dignified independence with which Addison worked his way amid great hardships and difficulties to the highest position in the State; but they have a yet more honourable application to the task he performed of reconciling the social dissensions of his countrymen. "The blood and judgment well commingled" are visible in the standard of conduct which he held up for Englishmen in his writings, as well as in his use of the weapon of ridicule against all

aberrations from good breeding and common-sense. Those only will estimate him at his true worth who will give, what Johnson says is his due, "their days and nights" to the study of the *Spectator*. But from the general reader less must be expected; and as the first chapter of this volume has been devoted to a brief view of the disorder of society with which Addison had to deal, it may be fitting in the last to indicate some of the main points in which he is to be regarded as the reconciler of parties and the founder of public opinion.

I have shown how, after the final subversion by the Civil War of the old-fashioned Catholic and Feudal standards of social life, two opposing ideals of conduct remained harshly confronting each other in the respective moral codes of the Court and the Puritans. The victorious Puritans, averse to all the pleasures of sense and intolerant of the most harmless of natural instincts, had oppressed the nation with a religious despotism. The nation, groaning under the yoke, brought back its banished monarch, but was soon shocked to find sensual Pleasure exalted into a worship, and Impiety into a creed. Though civil war had ceased, the two parties maintained a truceless conflict of opinion: the Puritan proscribing all amusement because it was patronised by the godless malignants; the courtiers holding that no gentleman could be religious or strict in his morals without becoming tainted with the cant of the Roundheads. This harsh antagonism of sentiment is humorously illustrated by the excellent Sir Roger, who is made to moralise on the stupidity of party violence by recalling an incident of his own boyhood:

"The worthy knight, being but a stripling, had occasion to inquire which was the way to St. Anne's Lane, upon which the person whom he spoke to, instead of answering his question, called him a

young Popish cur, and asked him who made Anne a saint. The boy, being in some confusion, inquired of the next he met which was the way to Anne's Lane; but was called a prick-eared cur for his pains, and, instead of being shown the way, was told that she had been a saint before he was born, and would be one after he was hanged. 'Upon this,' says Sir Roger, 'I did not think it fit to repeat the former question, but going into every lane of the neighbourhood, asked what they called the name of that lane.'"<sup>1</sup>

It was Addison's aim to prove to the contending parties what a large extent of ground they might occupy in common. He showed the courtiers, in a form of light literature which pleased their imagination, and with a grace and charm of manner that they were well qualified to appreciate, that true religion was not opposed to good breeding. To this class in particular he addressed his papers on Devotion,<sup>2</sup> on Prayer,<sup>3</sup> on Faith,<sup>4</sup> on Temporal and Eternal Happiness.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, he brought his raillery to bear on the super-solemnity of the trading and professional classes, in whom the spirit of Puritanism was most prevalent. "About an age ago," says he, "it was the fashion in England for every one that would be thought religious to throw as much sanctity as possible into his face, and, in particular, to abstain from all appearances of mirth and pleasantry, which were looked upon as the marks of a carnal mind. The saint was of a sorrowful countenance, and generally eaten up with spleen and melancholy."<sup>6</sup>

It was doubtless for the benefit of this class that he wrote his three Essays on Cheerfulness,<sup>7</sup> in which the gloom of the Puritan creed is corrected by arguments founded on Natural Religion.

<sup>1</sup> *Spectator*, No. 125.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. iii., Nos. 201, 207.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 391.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 465.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 575.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 494.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, Nos. 381, 387, 393.

“The cheerfulness of heart,” he observes in a charming passage, “which springs up in us from the survey of Nature’s works is an admirable preparation for gratitude. The mind has gone a great way towards praise and thanksgiving that is filled with such secret gladness—a grateful reflection on the Supreme Cause who produces it, sanctifies it in the soul, and gives it its proper value. Such an habitual disposition of mind consecrates every field and wood, turns an ordinary walk into a morning or evening sacrifice, and will improve those transient gleams of joy, which naturally brighten up and refresh the soul on such occasions, into an inviolable and perpetual state of bliss and happiness.”

The same qualities appear in his dramatic criticisms. The corruption of the stage was to the Puritan, or the Puritanic moralist, not so much the effect as the cause of the corruption of society. To Jeremy Collier and his imitators the theatre in all its manifestations is equally abominable: they see no difference between Shakespeare and Wycherley. Dryden, who bowed before Collier’s rebuke with a penitent dignity that does him high honour, yet rallies him with humour on this point:

“Perhaps the Parson stretched a point too far  
When with our Theatres he waged a war;  
He tells you that this very Moral Age  
Received the first infection from the Stage;  
But sure a banisht Court with Lewdness fraught  
The seeds of open Vice returning brought;  
Thus lodged (as vice by great example thrives)  
It first debauched the daughters and the wives.”

Dryden was quite right. The Court after the Restoration was for the moment the sole school of manners; and the dramatists only reflected on the stage the inverted ideas which were accepted in society as the standard of good breeding. All sentiments founded on reverence for religion or the family or honourable industry, were ban-

ished from the drama because they were unacceptable at Court. The idea of virtue in a married woman would have seemed prodigious to Shadwell or Wycherley; Vanbrugh had no scruples in presenting to an audience a drunken parson in Sir John Brute; the merchant or tradesman seemed, like Congreve's Alderman Fondlewife, to exist solely that their wives might be seduced by men of fashion. Addison and his disciples saw that these unnatural creations of the theatre were the product of the corruption of society, and that it was men, not institutions, that needed reform. Steele, always the first to feel a generous impulse, took the lead in raising the tone of stage morality in a paper which, characteristically enough, was suggested by some reflections on a passage in one of his own plays.<sup>1</sup> He followed up his attack by an admirable criticism, part of which has been already quoted, on Etherege's *Man in the Mode*, the hero of which, Sir Fopling Flutter, who had long been the model of young men of wit and fashion, he shows to be "a direct knave in his designs and a clown in his language."<sup>2</sup>

As usual, Addison improves the opportunity which Steele affords him, and with his grave irony exposes the ridiculous principle of the fashionable comedy by a simple statement of fact :

"Cuckoldom," says he, "is the basis of most of our modern plays. If an alderman appears upon the stage you may be sure it is in order to be cuckolded. An husband that is a little grave or elderly generally meets with the same fate. Knights and baronets, country squires, and justices of the quorum, come up to town for no other purpose. I have seen poor Dogget cuckolded in all these capacities. In short, our English writers are as frequently severe upon this innocent, unhappy creature, commonly known by the name of a cuckold, as the

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<sup>1</sup> *Spectator*, No. 51.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 65.

ancient comie writers were upon an eating parasite or a vainglorious soldier.

“ . . . I have sometimes thought of compiling a system of ethics out of the writings of these corrupt poets, under the title of Stage Morality; but I have been diverted from this thought by a project which has been executed by an ingenious gentleman of my acquaintance. He has composed, it seems, the history of a young fellow who has taken all his notions of the world from the stage, and who has directed himself in every circumstance of his life and conversation by the maxims and examples of the fine gentleman in English comedies. If I can prevail upon him to give me a copy of this new-fashioned novel, I will bestow on it a place in my works, and question not but it may have as good an effect upon the drama as Don Quixote had upon romance.”<sup>1</sup>

Nothing could be more skilful than this. Collier’s invective no doubt produced a momentary flutter among the dramatists, who, however, soon found they had little to fear from arguments which appealed only to that serious portion of society which did not frequent the theatre. But Addison’s penetrating wit, founded as it was on truth and reason, was appreciated by the fashionable world. Dorian and Sir Fopling Flutter felt ashamed of themselves. The cuckold disappeared from the stage. In society itself marriage no longer appeared ridiculous.

“It is my custom,” says the *Spectator* in one of his late papers, “to take frequent opportunities of inquiring from time to time what success my speculations meet with in the town. I am glad to find, in particular, that my discourses on marriage have been well received. A friend of mine gives me to understand, from Doctors’ Commons, that more licenses have been taken out there of late than usual. I am likewise informed of several pretty fellows who have resolved to commence heads of families by the first favourable opportunity. One of them writes me word that he is ready to enter into the bonds

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<sup>1</sup> *Spectator*, No. 446.

of matrimony provided I will give it him under my hand (as I now do) that a man may show his face in good company after he is married, and that he need not be ashamed to treat a woman with kindness who puts herself into his power for life." <sup>1</sup>

So, too, in politics, it was not to be expected that Addison's moderation should exercise a restraining influence on the violence of Parliamentary parties. But in helping to form a reasonable public opinion in the more reflective part of the nation at large, his efforts could not have been unavailing. He was a steady and consistent supporter of the Whig party, and Bolingbroke found that, in spite of his mildness, his principles were proof against all the seductions of interest. He was, in fact, a Whig in the sense in which all the best political writers in our literature, to whichever party they may have nominally belonged—Bolingbroke, Swift, and Canning, as much as Somers and Burke—would have avowed themselves Whigs; as one, that is to say, who desired above all things to maintain the constitution of his country. He attached himself to the Whigs of his period because he saw in them, as the associated defenders of the liberties of the Parliament, the best counterpoise to the still preponderant power of the Crown. But he would have repudiated as vigorously as Burke the democratic principles to which Fox, under the stimulus of party spirit, committed the Whig connection at the outbreak of the French Revolution; and for that stupid and ferocious spirit, generated by party, which would deny to opponents even the appearance of virtue and intelligence, no man had a more wholesome contempt. Page after page of the *Spectator* shows that Addison perceived as clearly as Swift the theoretical absurdity of the party system, and tolerated it only as an evil inseparable

<sup>1</sup> *Spectator*, No. 525 (by Hughes).



from the imperfection of human nature and free institutions. He regarded it as the parent of hypocrisy and self-deception.

“Intemperate zeal, bigotry, and persecution for any party or opinion, how praiseworthy soever they may appear to weak men of our own principles, produce infinite calamities among mankind, and are highly criminal in their own nature; and yet how many persons, eminent for piety, suffer such monstrous and absurd principles of action to take root in their minds under the colour of virtues! For my own part, I must own I never yet knew any party so just and reasonable that a man could follow it in its height and violence and at the same time be innocent.”<sup>1</sup>

As to party-writing, he considered it identical with lying.

“A man,” says he, “is looked upon as bereft of common-sense that gives credit to the relations of party-writers; nay, his own friends shake their heads at him and consider him in no other light than as an officious tool or a well-meaning idiot. When it was formerly the fashion to husband a lie and trump it up in some extraordinary emergency it generally did execution, and was not a little useful to the faction that made use of it; but at present every man is upon his guard: the artifice has been too often repeated to take effect.”<sup>2</sup>

Sir Roger de Coverley “often closes his narrative with reflections on the mischief that parties do in the country.”

“There cannot,” says the *Spectator* himself, “a greater judgment befall a country than such a dreadful spirit of division as rends a government into two distinct people, and makes them greater strangers and more averse to one another than if they were actually two different nations. The effects of such a division are pernicious to the last degree, not only with regard to those advantages which they give the common enemy, but to those private evils which they produce in the heart of almost every particular person. This influence

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<sup>1</sup> *Spectator*, No. 399.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 507.

is very fatal both to men's morals and to their understandings; it sinks the virtue of a nation, and not only so, but destroys even common-sense."<sup>1</sup>

Nothing in the work of Addison is more suggestive of the just and well-balanced character of his genius than his papers on Women. It has been already said that the seventeenth century exhibits the decay of the Feudal Ideal. The passionate adoration with which women were regarded in the age of chivalry degenerated after the Restoration into a habit of insipid gallantry or of brutal license. Men of fashion found no mean for their affections between a Sacharissa and a Duchess of Cleveland, while the domestic standard of the time reduced the remainder of the sex to the position of virtuous but uninteresting household drudges. Of woman, as the companion and the helpmate of man, the source of all the grace and refinements of social intercourse, no trace is to be found in the literature of the Restoration except in the Eve of Milton's still unstudied poem: it is not too much to say that she was the creation of the *Spectator*.

The feminine ideal, at which the essayists of the period aimed, is very well described by Steele in a style which he imitated from Addison:

"The other day," he writes, in the character of a fictitious female correspondent, "we were several of us at a tea-table, and, according to custom and your own advice, had the *Spectator* read among us. It was that paper wherein you are pleased to treat with great freedom that character which you call a woman's man. We gave up all the kinds you have mentioned except those who, you say, are our constant visitants. I was upon the occasion commissioned by the company to write to you and tell you 'that we shall not part with the men we have at present until the men of sense think fit to re-

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<sup>1</sup> *Spectator*, No. 125.

lieve them and give us their company in their stead.' You cannot imagine but we love to hear reason and good sense better than the ribaldry we are at present entertained with, but we must have company, and among us very inconsiderable is better than none at all. We are made for the cements of society, and come into the world to create relations amongst mankind, and solitude is an unnatural being to us."<sup>1</sup>

In contrast with the character of the writer of this letter—a type which is always recurring in the *Spectator*—modest and unaffected, but at the same time shrewd, wit, and refined, are introduced very eccentric specimens of womanhood, all tending to illustrate the derangement of the social order—the masculine woman, the learned woman, the female politician, besides those that more properly belong to the nature of the sex, the prude and the coquette. A very graceful example of Addison's peculiar humour is found in his satire on that false ambition in women which prompts them to imitate the manners of men :

"The girls of quality," he writes, describing the customs of the Republic of Women, "from six to twelve years old, were put to public schools, where they learned to box and play at cudgels, with several other accomplishments of the same nature, so that nothing was more usual than to see a little miss returning home at night with a broken pate, or two or three teeth knocked out of her head. They were afterwards taught to ride the great horse, to shoot, dart, or sling, and listed themselves into several companies in order to perfect themselves in military exercises. No woman was to be married till she had killed her man. The ladies of fashion used to play with young lions instead of lap-dogs; and when they had made any parties of diversion, instead of entertaining themselves at ombre and piquet, they would wrestle and pitch the bar for a whole afternoon together. There was never any such thing as a blush seen or a sigh heard in the whole commonwealth."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Spectator*, No. 158.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 434.

The amazon was a type of womanhood peculiarly distasteful to Addison, whose humour delighted itself with all the curiosities and refinements of feminine caprice—the fan, the powder-box, and the petticoat. Nothing can more characteristically suggest the exquisiteness of his fancy than a comparison of Swift's verses on a *Lady's Dressing-Room* with the following, which evidently gave Pope a hint for one of the happiest passages in *The Rape of the Lock* :

“The single dress of a woman of quality is often the product of a hundred climates. The muff and the fan come together from the different ends of the earth. The scarf is sent from the torrid zone, and the tippet from beneath the Pole. The brocade petticoat rises out of the mines of Peru, and the diamond necklace out of the bowels of Indostan.”<sup>1</sup>

To turn to Addison's artistic genius, the crowning evidence of his powers is the design and the execution of the *Spectator*. Many writers, and among them Macaulay, have credited Steele with the invention of the *Spectator* as well as of the *Tatler*; but I think that a close examination of the opening papers in the former will not only prove, almost to demonstration, that on this occasion Steele was acting as the lieutenant of his friend, but will also show the admirable artfulness of the means by which Addison executed his intention. The purpose of the *Spectator* is described in the tenth number, which is by Addison :

“I shall endeavour,” said he, “to enliven morality with wit, and to temper wit with morality, that my readers may, if possible, both ways find their account in the speculation of the day. And to the end that their virtue and discretion may not be short, transient, intermitting starts of thought, I have resolved to refresh their memo-

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<sup>1</sup> *Spectator*, No. 69.

ries from day to day till I have recovered them out of that desperate state of vice and folly into which the age has fallen."

That is to say, his design was "to hold as 'twere the mirror up to nature," so that the conscience of society might recognise in a dramatic form the character of its lapses from virtue and reason. The indispensable instrument for the execution of this design was the *Spectator* himself, the silent embodiment of right reason and good taste, who is obviously the conception of Addison.

"I live in the world rather as a spectator of mankind than as one of the species by which means I have made myself a speculative statesman, soldier, merchant, and artizan, without ever meddling with any practical part in life. I am very well versed in the theory of a husband, or a father, and can discern the errors in the economy, business, and diversion of others better than those who are engaged in them, as standers-by discover blots which are apt to escape those who are in the game. I never espoused any party with violence, and am resolved to observe an exact neutrality between the Whigs and Tories unless I shall be forced to declare myself by the hostilities of either side. In short, I have acted in all the parts of my life as a looker-on, which is the character I intend to preserve in this paper."

In order, however, to give this somewhat inanimate figure life and action, he is represented as the principal member of a club, his associates consisting of various representatives of the chief "interests" of society. We can scarcely doubt that the club was part of the original and central conception of the work; and if this be so, a new light is thrown on some of the features in the characters of the *Spectator* which have hitherto rather perplexed the critics.

"The *Spectator's* friends," says Macaulay, "were first sketched by Steele. Four of the club—the templar, the clergyman, the soldier, and the merchant—were uninteresting figures, fit only for a back-

ground. But the other two—an old country baronet and an old town rake—though not delineated with a very delicate pencil, had some good strokes. Addison took the rude outlines into his own hands, retouched them, coloured them, and is in truth the creator of the Sir Roger de Coverley and the Will Honeycomb with whom we are all familiar.”

This is a very misleading account of the matter. It implies that the characters in the *Spectator* were mere casual conceptions of Steele's; that Addison knew nothing about them till he saw Steele's rough draft; and that he, and he alone, is the creator of the finished character of Sir Roger de Coverley. But, as a matter of fact, the character of Sir Roger is full of contradictions and inconsistencies; and the want of unity which it presents is easily explained by the fact that it is the work of four different hands. Sixteen papers on the subject were contributed by Addison, seven by Steele, three by Budgell, and one by Tickell. Had Sir Roger been, as Macaulay seems to suggest, merely the stray phantom of Steele's imagination, it is very unlikely that so many different painters should have busied themselves with his portrait. But he was from the first intended to be a *type* of a country gentleman, just as much as Don Quixote was an imaginative representation of many Spanish gentlemen whose brains had been turned by the reading of romances. In both cases the type of character was so common and so truly conceived as to lend itself easily to the treatment of writers who approached it with various conceptions and very unequal degrees of skill. Any critic, therefore, who regards Sir Roger de Coverley as the abstract conception of a single mind is certain to misconceive the character. This error lies at the root of Johnson's description of the knight:

“Of the characters,” says he, “feigned or exhibited in the *Spectator*, the favourite of Addison was Sir Roger de Coverley, of whom he had formed a very delicate and discriminated idea, which he would not suffer to be violated; and therefore when Steele had shown him innocently picking up a girl in the Temple and taking her to a tavern, he drew upon himself so much of his friend’s indignation that he was forced to appease him by a promise of forbearing Sir Roger for the time to come. . . . It may be doubted whether Addison ever filled up his original delineation. He describes his knight as having his imagination somewhat warped; but of this perversion he has made very little use. The irregularities in Sir Roger’s conduct seem not so much the effects of a mind deviating from the beaten track of life, by the perpetual pressure of some overwhelming idea, as of habitual rusticity and that negligence which solitary grandeur naturally generates. The variable weather of the mind, the flying vapours of incipient madness, which from time to time cloud reason without eclipsing it, it requires so much nicety to exhibit, that Addison seems to have been deterred from prosecuting his own design.”

But Addison never had any design of the kind. Steele, indeed, describes Sir Roger in the second number of the *Spectator* as “a gentleman that is very singular in his behaviour,” but he added that “his singularities proceed from his good sense, and are contradictions to the manners of the world, only, as he thinks, the world is in the wrong.” Addison regarded the knight from a different point of view. “My friend Sir Roger,” he says, “amidst all his good qualities is *something of a humourist*; his virtues as well as imperfections are, as it were, tinged by a certain extravagance which makes them particularly his, and distinguishes them from those of other men. This cast of mind, as it is generally very innocent in itself, so it renders his conversation highly agreeable and more delightful than the same degree of sense and virtue would appear in their common and ordinary colours.”

The fact is, as I have already said, that it had evidently

been predetermined by the designers of the *Spectator* that the Club should consist of certain recognised and familiar types; the different writers, in turns, worked on these types, each for his own purpose and according to the bent of his own genius. Steele gave the first sketch of Sir Roger in a few rough but vigorous strokes, which were afterwards greatly refined and altered by Addison. In Steele's hands the knight appears indeed as a country squire, but he has also a town-house in Soho Square, then the most fashionable part of London. He had apparently been originally "a fine gentleman," and only acquired his old-fashioned rusticity of manners in consequence of a disappointment in love. All his oddities date from this adventure, though his heart has outlived the effects of it. "There is," we are told, "such a mirthful cast in his behaviour that he is rather beloved than esteemed." Steele's imagination had evidently been chiefly caught by the humour of Sir Roger's love affair, which is made to reflect the romantic cast of poetry affected after the Restoration, and forms the subject of two papers in the series; in two others—recording respectively the knight's kindness to his servants, and his remarks on the portraits of his ancestors—the writer takes up the idea of Addison; while another gives an account of a dispute between Sir Roger and Sir Andrew Freeport on the merits of the moneyed interest. Addison, on the other hand, had formed a far finer conception of the character of the country gentleman, and one that approaches the portrait of Don Quixote. As a humourist he perceived the incongruous position in modern society of one nourished in the beliefs, principles, and traditions of the old feudal world; and hence, whenever the knight is brought into contact with modern ideas, he invests his observations, as the *Spectator* says, with "a cer-



tain extravagance" which constitutes their charm. Such are the papers describing his behaviour at church, his inclination to believe in witchcraft, and his Tory principles; such, in another vein, are his criticisms in the theatre, his opinions of Spring Gardens, and his delightful reflections on the tombs in Westminster Abbey. But Addison was also fully alive to the beauty and nobility of the feudal idea, which he brings out with great animation in the various papers describing the patriarchal relations existing between Sir Roger and his servants, retainers, and tenants, closing the series with the truly pathetic account of the knight's death. It is to be observed that he drops altogether Steele's idea of Sir Roger having once been a man of fashion, which is indeed discarded by Steele himself when co-operating with his friend on the picture of country-life. Addison also quite disregards Steele's original hint about "the humble desires" of his hero; and he only once makes incidental mention of the widow.

Budgell contributed three papers on the subject—two in imitation of Addison; one describing a fox-hunt, and the other giving Sir Roger's opinion on beards; the third, in imitation of Steele, showing Sir Roger's state of mind on hearing of the addresses of Sir David Dundrum to the widow. The number of the *Spectator* which is said to have so greatly displeased Addison was written, not, as Johnson says, by Steele, but by Tickell. It goes far to confirm my supposition that the characters of the Club had been agreed upon beforehand. The trait which Tickell describes would have been natural enough in an ordinary country gentleman, though it was inconsistent with the fine development of Sir Roger's character in the hands of Addison.

In his capacity of critic Addison has been variously

judged, and, it may be added, generally undervalued. We find that Johnson's contemporaries were reluctant to allow him the name of critic. "His criticism," Johnson explains, "is condemned as tentative or experimental rather than scientific; and he is considered as deciding by taste rather than by principles." But if Aristotle is right in saying that the virtuous man is the standard of virtue, the man of sound instincts and perceptions ought certainly to be accepted as a standard in the more debatable region of taste. There can, at any rate, be no doubt that Addison's artistic judgments, founded on instinct, were frequently much nearer the mark than Johnson's, though these were based on principle. Again, Macaulay says, "The least valuable of Addison's contributions to the *Spectator* are, in the judgment of our age, his critical papers;" but he adds, patronisingly, "The very worst of them is creditable to him when the character of the school in which he had been trained is fairly considered. The best of them were much too good for his readers. In truth, he was not so far behind our generation as he was before his own." By "the school in which he had been trained," Macaulay doubtless meant the critical traditions established by Boileau and Bouhours, and he would have justified the disparagement implied in his reference to them by pointing to the pedantic intolerance and narrowness of view which these traditions encouraged. But in all matters of this kind there is loss and gain. If Addison's generation was much more insensible than our own to a large portion of imaginative truth, it had a far keener perception of the laws and limits of expression; and, granted that Voltaire was wrong in regarding Shakespeare as an "inspired barbarian," he would never have made the mistake which critics now make every day of mistaking nonsense for poetry.

But it may well be questioned if Addison's criticism is only "tentative and experimental." The end of criticism is surely to produce a habit of reasoning rightly on matters of taste and imagination; and, with the exception of Sir Joshua Reynolds, no English critic has accomplished more in this direction than Addison. Before his time Dryden had scattered over a number of prefaces various critical remarks, admirably felicitous in thought and racy in expression. But he had made no attempt to write upon the subject systematically; and in practice he gave himself up without an effort to satisfy the tastes which a corrupt Court had formed, partly on the "false wit" of Cowley's following, partly on the extravagance and conceit of the French school of Romance. Addison, on the other hand, set himself to correct this depraved fashion by establishing in England, on a larger and more liberal basis, the standards of good breeding and common-sense which Boileau had already popularised in France. Nothing can be more just and discriminating than his papers on the difference between true and false wit.<sup>1</sup> He was the first to endeavour to define the limits of art and taste in his essays on the *Pleasures of the Imagination*;<sup>2</sup> and though his theory on the subject is obviously superficial, it sufficiently proves that his method of reasoning on questions of taste was much more than "tentative and experimental." "I could wish," he says, "there were authors who, beside the mechanical rules which a man of very little taste may discourse upon, would enter into the very spirit and soul of fine writing, and show us the several sources of that pleasure which rises in the mind on the perusal of a noble work." His studies of the French drama prevented him

<sup>1</sup> *Spectator*, Nos. 58-63, inclusive.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Nos. 411-421, inclusive.

from appreciating the great Elizabethan school of tragedy, yet many stray remarks in the *Spectator* show how deeply he was impressed by the greatness of Shakespeare's genius, while his criticisms on Tragedy did much to banish the tumid extravagance of the romantic style. His papers on Milton achieved the triumph of making a practically unknown poem one of the most popular classics in the language, and he was more than half a century before his age in his appreciation of the beauties of the English ballads. In fact, finding English taste in hopeless confusion, he left it in admirable order; and to those who are inclined to depreciate his powers as a critic the following observations of Johnson—not a very favourable judge—may be commended:

“It is not uncommon for those who have grown wise by the labour of others to add a little of their own, and overlook their masters. Addison is now despised by some who perhaps would never have seen his defects but by the light he afforded them. That he always wrote as he would write now cannot be affirmed; his instructions were such as the characters of his readers made proper. That general knowledge which now circulates in common talk was in his time rarely to be found. Men not professing learning were not ashamed of ignorance; and in the female world any acquaintance with books was distinguished only to be censured. His purpose was to infuse literary curiosity by gentle and unsuspected conveyance into the gay, the idle, and the wealthy; he therefore presented knowledge in the most alluring form, not lofty and austere, but accessible and familiar. When he showed them their defects, he showed them likewise that they might be easily supplied. His attempt succeeded; inquiry awakened and comprehension expanded. An emulation of intellectual elegance was excited, and from this time to our own life has been gradually exalted, and conversation purified and enlarged.”<sup>1</sup>

The essence of Addison's humour is irony. “One slight lineament of his character,” says Johnson, “Swift has pre-

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Addison.*

served. It was his practice, when he found any man invincibly wrong, to flatter his opinions by acquiescence and sink him yet deeper to absurdity." The same characteristic manifests itself in his writings under a great variety of forms. Sometimes it appears in the seemingly logical premises from which he draws an obviously absurd conclusion, as for instance :

"If in a multitude of counsellors there is safety, we ought to think ourselves the securest nation in the world. Most of our garrets are inhabited by statesmen, who watch over the liberties of their country, and make a shift to keep themselves from starving by taking into their care the properties of all their fellow-subjects."<sup>1</sup>

On other occasions he ridicules some fashion of taste by a perfectly grave and simple description of its object. Perhaps the most admirable specimen of this oblique manner is his satire on the Italian opera in the number of the *Spectator* describing the various lions who had fought on the stage with Nicolini. This highly-finished paper deserves to be quoted *in extenso* :

"There is nothing of late years has afforded matter of greater amusement to the town than Signor Nicolini's combat with a lion in the Haymarket, which has been very often exhibited to the general satisfaction of most of the nobility and gentry in the kingdom of Great Britain. Upon the first rumour of this intended combat it was confidently affirmed, and is still believed by many in both galleries, that there would be a tame lion sent from the tower every opera in order to be killed by Hydaspes. This report, though altogether groundless, so universally prevailed in the upper regions of the playhouse, that some of the refined politicians in those parts of the audience gave it out in a whisper that the lion was a cousin-german of the tiger who made his appearance in King William's days, and that the stage would be supplied with lions at the public expense during the whole session. Many, likewise, were the conjectures of the treatment which this lion

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<sup>1</sup> *Spectator*, No. 556.

was to meet with at the hands of Signor Nicolini ; some supposed that he was to subdue him in recitativo, as Orpheus used to serve the wild beasts in his time, and afterwards to knock him on the head ; some fancied that the lion would not pretend to lay his paws upon the hero, by reason of the received opinion that a lion will not hurt a virgin ; several, who pretended to have seen the opera in Italy, had informed their friends that the lion was to act a part in High Dutch, and roar twice or thrice to a thorough-bass before he fell at the feet of Hydaspes. To clear up a matter that was so variously reported, I have made it my business to examine whether this pretended lion is really the savage he appears to be or only a counterfeit.

“But, before I communicate my discoveries, I must acquaint the public that upon my walking behind the scenes last winter, as I was thinking upon something else, I accidentally jostled against an enormous animal that extremely startled me, and, upon my nearer survey of it, appeared to be a lion rampant. The lion, seeing me very much surprised, told me, in a gentle voice, that I might come by him if I pleased ; ‘for,’ says he, ‘I do not intend to hurt anybody.’ I thanked him very kindly and passed by him, and in a little time after saw him leap upon the stage and act his part with very great applause. It has been observed by several that the lion has changed his manner of acting twice or thrice since his first appearance ; which will not seem strange when I acquaint my reader that the lion has been changed upon the audience three several times. The first lion was a candle-snuffer, who, being a fellow of testy, choleric temper, overdid his part, and would not suffer himself to be killed so easily as he ought to have done ; besides, it was observed of him that he became more surly every time he came out of the lion ; and having dropped some words in ordinary conversation as if he had not fought his best, and that he suffered himself to be thrown on his back in the scuffle, and that he could wrestle with Mr. Nicolini for what he pleased out of his lion’s skin, it was thought proper to discard him ; and it is verily believed to this day that, had he been brought upon the stage another time, he would certainly have done mischief. Besides, it was objected against the first lion that he reared himself so high upon his hinder paws and walked in so erect a posture that he looked more like an old man than a lion.

“The second lion was a tailor by trade, who belonged to the playhouse, and had the character of a mild and peaceable man in his

profession. If the former was too furious, this was too sheepish for his part, insomuch that, after a short, modest walk upon the stage, he would fall at the first touch of Hydaspes, without grappling with him and giving him an opportunity of showing his variety of Italian trips. It is said, indeed, that he once gave him a rip in his flesh-coloured doublet; but this was only to make work for himself in his private character of a tailor. I must not omit that it was this second lion who treated me with so much humanity behind the scenes.

“The acting lion at present is, as I am informed, a country gentleman, who does it for his diversion, but desires his name may be concealed. He says, very handsomely in his own excuse, that he does not act for gain; that he indulges an innocent pleasure in it; and that it is better to pass away an evening in this manner than in gaming and drinking; but he says at the same time, with a very agreeable raillery upon himself, that, if his name were known, the ill-natured world might call him ‘the ass in the lion’s skin.’ This gentleman’s temper is made out of such a happy mixture of the mild and the choleric that he outdoes both his predecessors, and has drawn together greater audiences than have been known in the memory of man.

“I must not conclude my narrative without taking notice of a groundless report that has been raised to a gentleman’s disadvantage of whom I must declare myself an admirer; namely, that Signor Nicolini and the lion have been seen sitting peaceably by one another and smoking a pipe together behind the scenes; by which their common enemies would insinuate that it is but a sham combat which they represent upon the stage; but upon inquiry I find that, if any such correspondence has passed between them, it was not till the combat was over, when the lion was to be looked on as dead, according to the received rules of the drama. Besides, this is what is practised every day in Westminster Hall, where nothing is more usual than to see a couple of lawyers who have been tearing each other to pieces in the court embracing one another as soon as they are out of it.”<sup>1</sup>

In a somewhat different vein, the ridicule cast by the *Spectator* on the fashions of his day, by anticipating the judgment of posterity on himself, is equally happy:

<sup>1</sup> *Spectator*, No. 13.

“As for his speculations, notwithstanding the several obsolete words and obscure phrases of the age in which he lived, we still understand enough of them to see the diversions and characters of the English nation in his time; not but that we are to make allowance for the mirth and humour of the author, who has doubtless strained many representations of things beyond the truth. For, if we must interpret his words in their literal meaning, we must suppose that women of the first quality used to pass away whole mornings at a puppet show; that they attested their principles by their patches; that an audience would sit out an evening to hear a dramatical performance written in a language which they did not understand; that chairs and flowerpots were introduced as actors upon the British stage; that a promiscuous assembly of men and women were allowed to meet at midnight in masks within the verge of the Court; with many improbabilities of the like nature. We must, therefore, in these and in the like cases, suppose that these remote hints and allusions aimed at some certain follies which were then in vogue, and which at present we have not any notion of.”<sup>1</sup>

His power of ridiculing keenly without malignity is of course best shown in his character of Sir Roger de Coverley, whose delightful simplicity of mind is made the medium of much good-natured satire on the manners of the Tory country gentlemen of the period. One of the most exquisite touches is the description of the extraordinary conversion of a dissenter by the Act against Occasional Conformity.

“He (Sir Roger) then launched out into praise of the late Act of Parliament for securing the Church of England, and told me with great satisfaction that he believed it already began to take effect, for that a rigid dissenter who chanced to dine in his house on Christmas day had been observed to eat very plentifully of his plum-porridge.”<sup>2</sup>

The mixture of fashionable contempt for book-learning, blended with shrewd mother-wit, is well represented in

<sup>1</sup> *Spectator*, No. 101.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 269.



the character of Will Honeycomb, who "had the discretion not to go out of his depth, and had often a certain way of making his real ignorance appear a seeming one." One of Will's happiest flights is on the subject of ancient looking-glasses. "Nay," says he, "I remember Mr. Dryden in his *Ovid* tells us of a swinging fellow called Polypheme, that made use of the sea for his looking-glass, and could never dress himself to advantage but in a calm."

Budgell, Steele, and Addison seem all to have worked on the character of Will Honeycomb, which, however, presents none of the inconsistencies that appear in the portrait of Sir Roger de Coverley. Addison was evidently pleased with it, and in his own inimitable ironic manner gave it its finishing touches by making Will, in his character of a fashionable gallant, write two letters scoffing at wedlock and then marry a farmer's daughter. The conclusion of the letter in which he announces his fate to the *Spectator* is an admirable specimen of Addison's humour:

"As for your fine women I need not tell thee that I know them. I have had my share in their graces; but no more of that. It shall be my business hereafter to live the life of an honest man, and to act as becomes the master of a family. I question not but I shall draw upon me the raillery of the town, and be treated to the tune of "The Marriage-hater Matched;" but I am prepared for it. I have been as witty as others in my time. To tell thee truly, I saw such a tribe of fashionable young fluttering coxcombs shot up that I do not think my post of an *homme de ruelle* any longer tenable. I felt a certain stiffness in my limbs which entirely destroyed the jauntiness of air I was once master of. Besides, for I must now confess my age to thee, I have been eight-and-forty above these twelve years. Since my retirement into the country will make a vacancy in the Club, I could wish that you would fill up my place with my friend Tom Dapperwit. He has an infinite deal of fire, and knows the town. For my own part, as I have said before, I shall endeavour to live

hereafter suitable to a man in my station, as a prudent head of a family, a good husband, a careful father (when it shall so happen), and as

Your most sincere friend and humble servant,

“WILLIAM HONEYCOMB.”<sup>1</sup>

I have already alluded to the delight with which the fancy of Addison played round the caprices of female attire. The following—an extract from the paper on the “fair sex” which specially roused the spleen of Swift—is a good specimen of his style when in this vein :

“To return to our female heads. The ladies have been for some time in a kind of moulting season with regard to that part of their dress, having cast great quantities of ribbon, lace, and cambric, and in some measure reduced that part of the human figure to the beautiful globular form which is natural to it. We have for a great while expected what kind of ornament would be substituted in the place of those antiquated commodes. But our female projectors were all the last summer so taken up with the improvement of their petticoats that they had not time to attend to anything else ; but having at length sufficiently adorned their lower parts, they now begin to turn their thoughts upon the other extremity, as well remembering the old kitchen proverb, ‘that if you light your fire at both ends, the middle will shift for itself.’”<sup>2</sup>

Addison may be said to have almost created and wholly perfected English prose as an instrument for the expression of *social* thought. Prose had of course been written in many different manners before his time. Bacon, Cowley, and Temple had composed essays ; Hooker, Sir Thomas Browne, Hobbes, and Locke philosophical treatises ; Milton controversial pamphlets ; Dryden critical prefaces ; Raleigh and Clarendon histories ; Taylor, Barrow, South, and Tillotson sermons. But it cannot be said that any of these had founded a prose style which, besides being a reflection of the mind of the writer, could be taken as repre-

<sup>1</sup> *Spectator*, No. 530.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 265.

senting the genius and character of the nation. They write as if they were thinking apart from their audience, or as if they were speaking to it either from an inferior or superior position. The essayists had taken as their model Montaigne, and their style is therefore stamped, so to speak, with the character of soliloquy; the preachers, who perhaps did more than any writers to guide the genius of the language, naturally addressed their hearers with the authority of their office; Milton, even in controversy, rises from the natural sublimity of his mind to heights of eloquence to which the ordinary idioms of society could not have borne him; while Dryden, using the language with a raciness and rhythm probably unequalled in our literature, nevertheless exhibits in his prefaces an air of deference towards the various patrons he addresses. Moreover, many of the earlier prose writers had aimed at standards of diction which were inconsistent with the genius of the English tongue. Bacon, for instance, disfigures his style with the witty antitheses which found favour with the Elizabethan and early Stuart writers; Hooker, Milton, and Browne construct their sentences on a Latin model, which, though it often gives a certain dignity of manner, prevents anything like ease, simplicity, and lucidity of expression. Thus Hooker delights in inversions; both he and Milton protract their periods by the insertion of many subordinate clauses; and Browne "*projicit ampullas et sesquipedalia verba*" till the Saxon element seems almost eliminated from his style.

Addison took features of his style from almost all his predecessors: he assumes the characters of essayist, moralist, philosopher, and critic, but he blends them all together in his new capacity of journalist. He had accepted the public as his judges; and he writes as if some critical rep-

representative of the public were at his elbow, putting to the test of reason every sentiment and every expression. Warton tells us, in his *Essay on Pope*, that Addison was so fastidious in composition that he would often stop the press to alter a preposition or conjunction; and this evidence is corroborated in a very curious and interesting manner by the MS. of some of Addison's essays, discovered by Mr. Dykes Campbell in 1858.<sup>1</sup> A sentence in one of the papers on the *Pleasures of the Imagination* shows, by the various stages through which it passed before its form seemed satisfactory to the writer, what nice attention he gave to the balance, rhythm, and lucidity of his periods. In its original shape the sentence was written thus :

“For this reason we find the poets always crying up a Country Life; where Nature is left to herself, and appears to y<sup>e</sup> best advantage.”

This is rather bald, and the MS. is accordingly corrected as follows :

“For this reason we find all Fancifull men, and y<sup>e</sup> poets in particular, still in love with a Country Life; where Nature is left to herself, and furnishes out all y<sup>e</sup> variety of Scenes y<sup>t</sup> are most delightful to y<sup>e</sup> Imagination.”

The text as it stands is this :

“For this reason we always find the poet in love with a country life, where nature appears in the greatest perfection, and furnishes out all those scenes that are most apt to delight the imagination.”<sup>2</sup>

This is certainly the best, both in point of sense and sound. Addison perceived that there was a certain contradiction in the idea of Nature being “left to herself,”

<sup>1</sup> I have to thank Mr. Campbell for his kindness and courtesy in sending me the volume containing this collection.

<sup>2</sup> *Spectator*, No. 414.

and at the same time *furnishing* scenes for the pleasure of the imagination; he therefore imparted the notion of design by striking out the former phrase and substituting "seen in perfection;" and he emphasised the idea by afterwards changing "delightful" into the stronger phrase "apt to delight." The improvement of the rhythm of the sentence in its final form is obvious.

With so much elaboration of style it is natural that there should be in Addison's essays a disappearance of that egotism which is a characteristic—and a charming one—of Montaigne; his moralising is natural, for the age required it, but is free from the censoriousness of the preacher; his critical and philosophical papers all assume an intelligence in his reader equal to his own.

This perfection of breeding in writing is an art which vanishes with the *Tatler* and *Spectator*. Other critics, other humourists have made their mark in English literature, but no second Addison has appeared. Johnson took him for his model so far as to convey lessons of morality to the public by means of periodical essays. But he confesses that he addressed his audience in tones of "dictatorial instruction;" and any one who compares the ponderous sententiousness and the elaborate antithesis of the *Rambler* with the light and rhythmical periods of the *Spectator* will perceive that the spirit of preaching is gaining ground on the genius of conversation. Charles Lamb, again, has passages which, for mere delicacy of humour, are equal to anything in Addison's writings. But the superiority of Addison consists in this, that he expresses the humour of the life about him, while Lamb is driven to look at its oddities from outside. He is not, like Addison, a moralist or a satirist; the latter indeed performed his task so thoroughly that the turbulent license of Mo-

hocks, Tityre Tus, and such like brotherhoods, gradually disappeared before the advance of a tame and orderly public opinion. To Lamb, looking back on the primitive stages of society from a safe distance, vice itself seemed pardonable because picturesque, much in the same way as travellers began to admire the loneliness and the grandeur of nature when they were relieved from apprehensions for the safety of their purses and their necks. His humour is that of a sentimentalist; it dwells on odd nooks and corners, and describes quaint survivals in men and things. For our own age, when all that is picturesque in society is being levelled by a dull utilitarianism, this vein of eccentric imagination has a special charm, but the taste is likely to be a transient one. Mrs. Battle will amuse so long as this generation remembers the ways of its grandmothers: two generations hence the point of its humour will probably be lost. But the figure of Sir Roger de Coverley, though it belongs to a bygone stage of society, is as durable as human nature itself, and, while the language lasts, the exquisite beauty of the colours in which it is preserved will excite the same kind of pleasure. Scarcely below the portrait of the good knight will be ranked the character of his friend and biographer, the silent Spectator of men. A grateful posterity, remembering what it owes to him, will continue to assign him the reputation he coveted: "It was said of Socrates that he brought Philosophy down from heaven to inhabit among men; and I shall be ambitious to have it said of me that I have brought Philosophy out of closets and libraries, schools and colleges, to dwell at clubs and assemblies, at tea-tables and in coffee-houses."

THE END.

SHERIDAN

BY

MRS. OLIPHANT





## NOTE.

THE most important and, on the whole, trustworthy life of Sheridan is that of Moore, published in 1825, nine years after Sheridan's death, and founded upon the fullest information, with the help of all that Sheridan had left behind in the way of papers, and all that the family could furnish—along with Moore's own personal recollections. It is not a very characteristic piece of work, and greatly dissatisfied the friends and lovers of Sheridan; but its authorities are unimpeachable. A previous Memoir by Dr. Watkins, the work of a political opponent and detractor, was without either this kind of authorisation or any grace of personal knowledge, and has fallen into oblivion. Very different is the brief sketch by the well-known Professor Smyth, a most valuable and interesting contribution to the history of Sheridan. It concerns, indeed, only the later part of his life, but it is the most life-like and, under many aspects, the most touching contemporary portrait that has been made of him. With the professed intention of making up for the absence of character in Moore's *Life*, a small volume of *SHERIDANIANA* was published the year after, which is full of amusing anecdotes, but little, if any, additional information. Other essays on the subject have been many. Scarcely an edition of Sheridan's plays has been published (and they are numberless) without a biographical notice, good or bad. The most noted of these is perhaps the *Biographical and Critical Sketch*

of Leigh Hunt, which does not, however, pretend to any new light, and is entirely unsympathetic. Much more recently a book of personal *Recollections by an Octogenarian* promised to afford new information; but, except for the froth of certain dubious and not very savoury stories of the Prince Regent period, failed to do so.

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# RICHARD BRINSLEY SHERIDAN.

## CHAPTER I.

### HIS YOUTH.

RICHARD BRINSLEY BUTLER SHERIDAN was born in Dublin, in the month of September, 1751, of a family which had already acquired some little distinction of a kind quite harmonious with the after fame of him who made its name so familiar to the world. The Sheridans were of that Anglo-Irish type which has given so much instruction and amusement to the world, and which has indeed in its wit and eccentricity so associated itself with the fame of its adopted country, that we might almost say it is from this peculiar variety of the race that we have all taken our idea of the national character. It will be a strange thing to discover, after so many years' identification of the idiosyncrasy as Irish, that in reality it is a hybrid, and not native to the soil. The race of brilliant, witty, improvident, and reckless Irishmen whom we have all been taught to admire, excuse, love, and condemn—the Goldsmiths, the Sheridans, and many more that will occur to the reader—all belong to this mingled blood. Many are more Irish, according to our present understanding of the word, than their compatriots of a purer race; but perhaps it is some-

thing of English energy which has brought them to the front, to the surface, with an indomitable life which misfortune and the most reckless defiance of all the laws of living never seem able to quench. Among these names, and not among the O'Connors and O'Briens, do we find all that is most characteristic, to modern ideas, in Irish manners and modes of thought. Nothing more distinct from the Anglo-Saxon type could be; and yet it is separated from England in most cases only by an occasional mixture of Celtic blood—often by the simple fact of establishment for a few generations on another soil. How it is that the bog and the mountain, the softer climate, the salt breath of the Atlantic, should have wrought this change, is a mystery of ethnology which we are quite incompetent to solve; or whether it is mere external contact with an influence which the native gives forth without being himself strongly affected by it, we cannot tell. But the fact remains that the most characteristic Irishmen—those through whom we recognize the race—are, as a matter of fact, so far as race is concerned, not Irishmen at all. The same fact tells in America, where a new type of character seems to have been ingrafted upon the old by the changed conditions of so vast a continent and circumstances so peculiar. Even this, however, is not so remarkable, in an altogether new society, as the absorption, by what was in reality an alien and a conquering race, of all that is most remarkable in the national character which they dominated and subdued—unless, indeed, we take refuge in the supposition, which does not seem untenable, that this character, which we have been so hasty in identifying with it, is not really Irish at all; and that we have not yet fathomed the natural spirit, overlaid by such a *couche* of superficial foreign brilliancy, of that more mystic race, full of



tragic elements, of visionary faith and purity, of wild revenge and subtle cunning, which is in reality native to the old island of the saints. Certainly the race of Columba seems to have little in common with the race of Sheridan.

The two immediate predecessors of the great dramatist are both highly characteristic figures, and thoroughly authentic, which is as much perhaps as any man of letters need care for. The first of these, Dr. Thomas Sheridan, Brinsley Sheridan's grandfather, was a clergyman and schoolmaster in Dublin in the early part of the eighteenth century—by all reports an excellent scholar and able instructor, but extravagant and hot-headed after his kind. He was the intimate friend and associate of Swift in his later years, and lent a little brightness to the great Dean's society when he returned disappointed to his Irish preferment. Lord Orrery describes this genial but reckless parson in terms which are entirely harmonious with the after development of the family character :

“He had that kind of good nature which absence of mind, indolence of body, and carelessness of fortune produce; and although not over-strict in his own conduct, yet he took care of the morality of his scholars, whom he sent to the university remarkably well-grounded in all kinds of learning, and not ill-instructed in the social duties of life. He was slovenly, indigent, and cheerful. He knew books better than men, and he knew the value of money least of all.”

The chief point in Dr. Sheridan's career is of a tragicomic character which still further increases the appropriateness of his appearance at the head of his descendants. By Swift's influence he was appointed to a living in Cork, in addition to which he was made one of the Lord-lieutenant's chaplains, and thus put in the way of promotion generally. But on one unlucky Sunday the following incident occurred. It must be remembered that these

were the early days of the Hanoverian succession, and that Ireland had been the scene of the last struggle for the Stuarts. He was preaching in Cork, in the principal church of the town, on the 1st of August, which was kept as the King's birthday :

“Dr. Sheridan, after a very solemn preparation, and when he had drawn to himself the mute attention of his congregation, slowly and emphatically delivered his text, *Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof*. The congregation, being divided in political opinions, gave to the text a decided political construction, and on the reverend preacher again reading the text with more marked emphasis became excited, and listened to the sermon with considerable restlessness and anxiety.”

Another account describes this sermon as having been preached before the Lord-lieutenant himself, an honour for which the preacher was not prepared, and which confused him so much that he snatched up the first sermon that came to hand, innocent of all political intention, as well as of the date which gave such piquancy to his text. But, whatever the cause, the effect was disastrous. He “shot his fortune dead by chance-medley” with this single text. He lost his chaplaincy, and is even said to have been forbidden the viceregal court, and all the ways of promotion were closed to him for ever. But his spirit was not broken by his evil luck. “Still he remained a punster, a quibbler, a fiddler, and a wit. Not a day passed without a rebus, an anagram, or a madrigal. His pen and his fiddle were constantly in motion.” He had “such a ready wit and flow of humour that it was impossible for any, even the most splenetic man, not to be cheerful in his company.” “In the invitations sent to the Dean, Sheridan was always included; nor was Swift to be seen in perfect good humour unless when he made part of the

company." Nothing could be more congenial to the name of Sheridan than the description of this light-hearted and easy-minded clerical humorist, whose wit no doubt flashed like lightning about all the follies of the mimic court which had cast him out, and whose jovial, hand-to-mouth existence had all that accidentalness and mixture of extravagance and penury which is the natural atmosphere of such reckless souls. It is even said that Swift made use of his abilities and appropriated his wit: the reader must judge for himself whether the Dean had any need of thieving in that particular.

Dr. Sheridan's son, Thomas Sheridan, was a very different man. He was very young when he was left to make his way in the world for himself; he had been designed, it would appear, to be a schoolmaster, like his father; but the stage has always had an attraction for those whose associations are connected with that more serious stage, the pulpit, and Thomas Sheridan became an actor. He is the author of a life of Swift, said to be "pompous and dull"—qualities which seem to have mingled oddly in his own character with the light-hearted recklessness of his race. His success on the stage was not so great as was his popularity as a teacher of elocution, an art for which he seems to have conceived an almost fanatical enthusiasm. Considering oratory, not without reason, as the master of all arts, he spent a great part of his life in eager efforts to form a school for its study, after a method of his own. This was not a successful project, nor, according to the little gleam of light thrown upon his system by Dr. Parr, does it seem to have been a very elevated one. "One of Richard's sisters now and then visited Harrow," he says, "and well do I remember that in the house where I lodged she triumphantly repeated Dryden's ode upon St. Cecilia's

Day, according to the instruction given her by her father.  
Take a sample :

‘None but the brave,  
None but the *brave*,  
None *but* the brave deserve the fair.’”

Thomas Sheridan, however, was not without appreciation as an actor, and, like every ambitious player of the time, had his hopes of rivalling Garrick, and was fondly considered by his friends to be worthy comparison with that king of actors. He married a lady who held no inconsiderable place in the light literature of the time, which was little, as yet, invaded by feminine adventure—the author of a novel called *Sidney Biddulph* and of various plays. And there is a certain reflection of the same kind of friendship which existed between Swift and the elder Sheridan in Boswell’s description, in his *Life of Johnson*, of the loss his great friend had sustained through a quarrel with Thomas Sheridan, “of one of his most agreeable resources for amusement in his lonely evenings.” It would appear that at this time (1763) Sheridan and his wife were settled in London :

“Sheridan’s well-informed, animated, and bustling mind never suffered conversation to stagnate,” Boswell adds, “and Mrs. Sheridan was a most agreeable companion to an intellectual man. She was sensible, ingenious, unassuming, yet communicative. I recollect with satisfaction many pleasing hours which I passed with her under the hospitable roof of her husband, who was to me a very kind friend. Her novel entitled *Memoirs of Miss Sidney Biddulph* contains an excellent moral, while it inculcates a future state of retribution; and what it teaches is impressed upon the mind by a series of as deep distresses as can afflict humanity in the amiable and pious heroine. . . Johnson paid her this high compliment upon it: ‘I know not, madam, that you have a right upon high principles to make your readers suffer so much.’”

The cause of Johnson's quarrel with Sheridan is said to have been some slighting words reported to the latter, which Johnson had let fall when he heard that Sheridan had received a pension of £200 a year from Government. "What! have they given *him* a pension? Then it is time for me to give up mine"—a not unnatural cause of offence, and all the more so that Sheridan flattered himself he had, by his interest with certain members of the ministry, who had been his pupils, helped to procure his pension for Johnson himself.

These were the palmy days of the Sheridan family. Their children, of whom Richard was the third, had been born in Dublin, where the two little boys, Richard and his elder brother, Charles, began their education under the charge of a schoolmaster named Whyte, to whom they were committed with a despairing letter from their mother, who evidently had found the task of their education too much for her. Perhaps Mrs. Sheridan, in an age of epigrams, was not above the pleasure, so seductive to all who possess the gift, of writing a clever letter. She tells the schoolmaster that the little pupils she is sending him will be his tutors in the excellent quality of patience. "I have hitherto been their only instructor," she says, "and they have sufficiently exercised mine, for two such impenetrable dunces I never met with." This is the first certificate with which the future wit and dramatist appeared before the world. When the parents went to London, in 1762, the boys naturally accompanied them. And this being a time of prosperity, when Thomas Sheridan had Cabinet Ministers for his pupils, and interest enough to help the great man of letters of the age to a pension, it is not to be wondered if that hope which never springs eternal in any human breast so warmly as in that of a man who lives by his

wits, and never knows what the morrow may bring forth, should have so encouraged the vivacious Irishman as to induce him to send his boys to Harrow, proud to give them the best of education, and opportunity of making friends for themselves. His pension, his pupils, his acting, his wife's literary gains, all conjoined to give a promise of prosperity. When his friends discussed him behind his back it is true they were not very favourable to him. "There is to be seen in Sheridan something to reprehend, and everything to laugh at," says Johnson, in his "big bow-wow style;" "but, sir, he is not a bad man. No, sir: were mankind to be divided into good and bad, he would stand considerably within the ranks of the good." The same authority said of him that though he could "exhibit no character," yet he excelled in "plain declamation;" and he was evidently received in very good society, and was hospitable and entertained his friends, as it was his nature to do. Evidently, too, he had no small opinion of himself. It is from Johnson's own mouth that the following anecdote at once of his liberality and presumption is derived. It does not show his critic, perhaps, in a more favourable light:

"Sheridan is a wonderful admirer of the tragedy of *Douglas*, and presented its author with a gold medal. Some years ago, at a coffee-house in Oxford, I called to him, 'Mr. Sheridan, Mr. Sheridan! how came you to give a gold medal to Home for writing that horrid play?' This you see was wanton and insolent; but I meant to be wanton and insolent. A medal has no value but as a stamp of merit, and was Sheridan to assume to himself the right of giving that stamp? If Sheridan was magnificent enough to bestow a gold medal as an honorary mark of dramatic merit, he should have requested one of the Universities to choose the person on whom it should be conferred. Sheridan had no right to give a stamp of merit; it was counterfeiting Apollo's coin."

The Irishman's vanity, prodigality, and hasty assumption of an importance to which he had no right could scarcely be better exemplified—nor, perhaps, the reader will say, the privileged arrogance of the great critic. It is more easy to condone the careless extravagance of the one than the deliberate insolence of the other. The comment, however, is just enough; and so, perhaps, was his description of the Irishman's attempt to improve the elocution of his contemporaries. "What influence can Mr. Sheridan have upon the language of this great country by his narrow exertions?" asks the great lexicographer. "Sir, it is burning a candle at Dover to show light at Calais." But when Johnson says, "Sir, Sherry is dull, naturally dull: but it must have taken him a great deal of pains to become what we now see him. Such an excess of stupidity, sir, is not in nature"—we acknowledge the wit, but doubt the fact. Thomas Sheridan very likely wanted humour, and was unable to perceive when he made himself ridiculous, as in the case of the medal; but we want a great deal more evidence to induce us to believe that the son of the jovial Dublin priest, and the father of Sheridan the great, could have been dull. He was very busy—"bustling," as Boswell calls him, his schemes going to his head, his vanity and enthusiasm combined making him feel himself an unappreciated reformer—a prophet thrown away upon an ungrateful age. But stupidity had nothing to do with his follies. He was "a wrong-headed, whimsical man," Dr. Parr tells us, but adds, "I respected him, and he really liked me and did me some important services." "I once or twice met his (Richard Sheridan's) mother: she was quite celestial." Such are the testimonies of their contemporaries.

It was not long, however, that the pair were able to re-

main in London. There is a whimsical indication of the state of distress into which Thomas Sheridan soon fell in the mention by Boswell of "the extraordinary attention in his own country" with which he had been "honoured," by having had "an exception made in his favour in an Irish Act of Parliament concerning insolvent debtors." "Thus to be singled out," says Johnson, "by Legislature as an object of public consideration and kindness is a proof of no common merit." It was a melancholy kind of proof, however, and one which few would choose to be gratified by. The family went to France, leaving their boys at Harrow, scraping together apparently as much as would pay their expenses there—no small burden upon a struggling man. And at Blois, in 1766, Mrs. Sheridan died. "She appears," says Moore, "to have been one of those rare women who, united to men of more pretensions but less real intellect than themselves, meekly conceal this superiority even from their own hearts, and pass their lives without a remonstrance or murmur in gently endeavouring to repair those evils which the indiscretion or vanity of their partners have brought upon them." Except that she found him at seven an impenetrable dunce, there is no record of any tie of sympathy existing between Mrs. Sheridan and her brilliant boy.

He had not perhaps, indeed, ever appeared in this character during his mother's lifetime. At Harrow he made but an unsatisfactory appearance. "There was little in his boyhood worth communication," says Dr. Parr, whose long letter on the subject all Sheridan's biographers quote; "he was inferior to many of his schoolfellows in the ordinary business of a school, and I do not remember any one instance in which he distinguished himself by Latin or English composition, either in prose or verse." This is



curious enough; but it is not impossible that the wayward boy, if he did adventure himself in verse, would think it best to keep his youthful compositions sacred from a master's eye. Verse writers, both in the dead languages and in the living, flourished at Harrow in those days of whom no one has heard since, "but Richard Sheridan aspired to no rivalry with either of them." Notwithstanding this absence of all the outward show of talent, Parr was not a man to remain unconscious of the glimmer of genius in the Irish boy's bright eyes. When he found that Dick would not construe as he ought, he laid plans to take him with craft, and "did not fail to probe and tease him":

"I stated his case with great good humour to the upper master, who was one of the best tempered men in the world: and it was agreed between us that Richard should be called oftener and worked more severely. The varlet was not suffered to stand up in his place, but was summoned to take his station near the master's table, where the voice of no prompter could reach him; and in this defenceless condition he was so harassed that he at last gathered up some grammatical rules and prepared himself for his lessons. While this tormenting process was inflicted upon him I now and then upbraided him. But you will take notice that he did not incur any corporal punishment for his idleness: his industry was just sufficient to keep him from disgrace. All the while Sumner and I saw in him vestiges of a superior intellect. His eye, his countenance, his general manner, were striking; his answers to any common question were prompt and acute. We knew the esteem and even admiration which somehow or other all his schoolfellows felt for him. He was mischievous enough, but his pranks were accompanied by a sort of vivacity and cheerfulness which delighted Sumner and myself. I had much talk with him about his apple loft, for the supply of which all the gardens in the neighbourhood were taxed, and some of the lower boys were employed to furnish it. I threatened, but without asperity, to trace the depredators through his associates up to the leader. He with perfect good humour set me at defiance, and I never could bring home the charge to him. All boys and all masters were pleased with him."

The amount of "good humour" in this sketch is enough to make the Harrow of last century look like a paradise; and the humorous torture to which young Sheridan was subjected shows a high sense of the appropriate either in "the best tempered man in the world," or in the learned doctor who loved to set forth his own doings and judgment in the best light, and had the advantage of telling his story after events had shown what the pupil was. Parr, however, modestly disowns the credit of having developed the intellectual powers of Sheridan, and neither were they stimulated into literary effort by Sumner, the head-master of Harrow, who was a friend of his father, and had, therefore, additional opportunities of knowing the boy's capabilities. "We both of us discovered great talents which neither of us were capable of calling into action while Sheridan was a schoolboy," Parr says. In short, it is evident that the boy, always popular and pleasant, amusing and attracting his schoolfellows, and on perfectly amicable terms with the masters, even when he was doubtful about his lesson, took no trouble whatever with his work, and cared nothing for the honours of school. He kept himself afloat, and that was all. His sins were not grievous in any way. He had it not in his power to be extravagant, for Thomas Sheridan in his bankrupt condition must have had hard enough ado to keep his boys at Harrow at all. But it is very clear that neither scholarship nor laborious mental exertion of any kind tempted him. He took the world lightly and gaily, and enjoyed his schoolboy years all the more that there was nothing of the struggle of young ambition in them. When his family came back from France, shortly after the mother's death, it is with a little gush of enthusiasm that his sister describes her first meeting after

long separation with the delightful brother whom she had half-forgotten, and who appears like a young hero in all the early bloom of seventeen, with his Irish charm and his Harrow breeding, to the eyes of the little girl, accustomed, no doubt, to shabby enough gentlemen in the cheap retreats of English poverty in France :

“He was handsome, not merely in the eyes of a partial sister, but generally allowed to be so. His cheeks had the glow of health, his eyes—the finest in the world—the brilliancy of genius, and were soft as a tender and affectionate heart could render them. The same playful fancy, the same sterling and innoxious wit that was shown afterwards in his writings, cheered and delighted the family circle. I admired—I almost adored him !”

No doubt the handsome, merry boy was a delightful novelty in the struggling family, where even the girls were taught to mouth verses, and the elder brother had begun to accompany his father on his half-vagabond career as a lecturer, to give examples of the system of elocution upon which he had concentrated all his faculties. After a short stay in London the family went to Bath, where for a time they settled, the place in its high days of fashion being propitious to all the arts. The father, seldom at home, lived a hard enough life, lecturing, teaching, sometimes playing, pursuing his favourite object as hotly as was practicable through all the struggles necessary to get a living, such as it was, now abundant, now meagre, for his family ; while the girls and boys lived a sort of hap-hazard existence in the gay city, getting what amusement they could—motherless, and left to their own resources, yet finding society of a sufficiently exciting kind among the visitors with whom the town overflowed, and the artist-folk who entertained them. Here, while Charles worked with his father, Richard would seem to have done nothing at all, but doubtless

strolled about the fashionable promenade among the bucks and beaux, and heard all that was going on, and saw the scandal-makers nod their heads together, and the officers now and then arrange a duel, and Lydia Languish ransack the circulating libraries. They were all about in those lively streets, Mrs. Malaprop deranging her epitaphs, and Sir Lucius with his pistols always ready, and the little waiting-maid tripping about the scene with Delia's letters and *Broken Vows* under her arm. The young gentleman swaggering among them saw everything without knowing it, and remembered those familiar figures when the time came; but in the meanwhile did nothing, living pleasantly with his young sisters, no doubt very kind to them, and spending all the money the girls could spare out of their little housekeeping, and falling in love, the most natural amusement of all.

It is wrong, however, to say that he was entirely idle. At Harrow he had formed an intimate friendship with a youth more ambitious than himself, the Nathaniel Halhed whom Dr. Parr chronicles as having "written well in Latin and Greek." With this young man Sheridan entered into a sort of literary partnership both in classical translation and dramatic composition. Their first attempt was a farce called *Jupiter*; the subject being the story of Ixion, in which, curiously enough, the after-treatment of the *Critic* is shadowed forth in various points, the little drama being in the form of a rehearsal before a tribunal not unlike that to which Mr. Puff submits his immortal tragedy. Simile, the supposed author, indeed, says one or two things which are scarcely unworthy of Puff. The following passage occurs in a scene in which he is explaining to his critics the new fashion of composition, how the music is made first, and "the sense" afterwards (a process no ways astonish-

ing to the present generation), and how "a complete set of scenes from Italy" is the first framework of the play which "some ingenious hand" writes up to. "By this method," says one of the wondering commentators, "you must often commit blunders?"—

"*Simile*. Blunders! to be sure I must, but I always could get myself out of them again. Why, I'll tell you an instance of it. You must know I was once a journeyman sonnet-writer to Signor Squaltini. Now, his method, when seized with the *furor harmonicus*, was constantly to make me sit by his side, while he was thrumming on his harpsichord, in order to make extempore verses to whatever air he should beat out to his liking. I remember one morning as he was in this situation—*thrum, thrum, thrum* (moving his fingers as if beating on the harpsichord)—striking out something prodigiously great, as he thought—'Hah!' said he; 'hah! Mr. Simile—*thrum, thrum, thrum*—by gar, him is vary fine—write me some words directly.' I durst not interrupt him to ask on what subject, so instantly began to describe a fine morning—

Calm was the land and calm the skies,  
And calm the heaven's dome serene,  
Hush'd was the gale and hush'd the breeze,  
And not a vapour to be seen.

"I sang it to his notes. 'Hah! upon my word, vary pritt—*thrum, thrum, thrum*. Stay, stay! Now, upon my word, here it must be an adagio. *Thrum, thrum, thrum*. Oh! let it be an Ode to Melancholy.'

"*Monop*. The devil! then you were puzzled sure—

"*Sim*. Not in the least! I brought in a cloud in the next stanza, and matters, you see, came about at once.

"*Monop*. An excellent transition.

"*O' Cd*. Vastly ingenious, indeed.

"*Sim*. Was it not, very? It required a little command—a little presence of mind."

When the rehearsal begins the resemblance is still more perfect, though there is no reproduction either of the plot or characters introduced. We are not told how much

share Halted had in the composition: it was he who furnished the skeleton of the play, but it is scarcely possible that such a scene as the above could be from any hand but Sheridan's. This youthful effort was never finished. It was to have brought in a sum of money, which they both wanted much, to the young authors: "The thoughts," Halted says, "of £200 shared between us are enough to bring the water into one's eyes." Halted, then at Oxford, wanted the money above all things to enable him to pay a visit to Bath, where lived the young lady whom all these young men adored; and young Sheridan, who can doubt, required it for a thousand uses. But they were both at an age when a great part of pleasure lies in the planning, and when the mind is easily diverted to another and another new beginning. A publication of the *Tatler* type was the next project, to be called (one does not know why) *Hernan's Miscellany*; but this never went further than a part composition of the first number, which is somewhat feeble and flippant, as the monologue of an essayist of that old-fashioned type, if not under any special inspiration, is apt to be. Finally the young men succeeded in producing a volume of so-called translations from a dubious Latin author called Aristænetus, of whom no one knows much, and on whom at least it was very easy for them to father the light and frothy verses, which no one was likely to seek for in the original—if an original existed. Their preface favours the idea that the whole business was a literary hoax by which they did not even expect their readers to be taken in. *Aristænetus* got itself published, the age being fond of classics rubbed down into modern verse, but does not seem to have done any more. The two young men were in hopes that Sumner, their old master, "and the wise few of their acquaintance," would talk about the

book, and perhaps discover the joint authorship, and help them to fame and profit. But these hopes were not realised, as indeed they did not in the least deserve to be. They were flattered by being told that Johnson was supposed to be the author, which must have been a friendly invention; and Halhed tried to believe that "everybody had read the book," and that the second part, vaguely promised in the preface on condition of the success of the first, "should be published immediately, being of opinion that the readers of the first volume would be sure to purchase the second, and that the publication of the second would put it into the heads of others to buy the first"—a truly business-like argument, which, however, did not convince the booksellers. It seems a pity to burden the collection of Sheridan's works now with these unprofitable verses, which were never acknowledged, and did not even procure for young Halhed, who wanted it so much, the happiness of a visit to Bath, or a sight of the object of his boyish adoration.

It is the presence of this lady which gives interest and romance to the early chapter of Sheridan's life, and the record cannot go further without bringing her in. There flourished at Bath in those days a family called by Dr. Burney, in his *History of Music*, a nest of nightingales—the family of Linley, the composer, who had been for years at the head of musical enterprise in the district, the favourite singing-master, the conductor of all the concerts, a man whom Bath delighted to honour, and whose fame spread over England by means of the *beau monde* which took the waters in that city of pleasure. The position that such a man takes in a provincial town has become once more so much like what it was in the latter half of last century, when Handel was at Windsor and

England in one of its musical periods, that it will be easily realised by the reader. The brevet rank, revocable at the pleasure of society, which the musical family obtains, its admission among all the fine people, the price it has to pay for its elevation, and the vain hope that it is prized for its own personal qualities, which flatters it while in its prime of attraction—the apparent equality, nay, almost superiority, of the triumphant musicians among their patrons, who yet never forget the real difference between them, and whose homage is often little more than a form of insult—give a dramatic interest to the group such as few possess. This was the position held by the Linleys among the fine people of Bath. There were beautiful girls in the musician's house, which was always open, hospitable, and bright, and where a perpetual flutter of admiration and compliments, half affectionate, half humorous, the enthusiasm of a coterie, was in the ears of the young creatures in all their early essays in art. Men of wealth and sometimes of rank, the gentlemen of the neighbourhood, the officers and the wits—all friends of Linley, and glad to invite him to club and coffee-house and mess-room—were always about to furnish escorts and a flattering train wherever the young singers went. The eldest daughter, Elizabeth—or Eliza, as it was the fashion of the time to shorten and vulgarise that beautiful name—was a lovely girl of sixteen when the young Sheridans became known about Bath. Her voice was as lovely as her face, and she was the *prima donna* of her father's concerts, going with him to sing at festivals in other cathedral towns, and often to Oxford, where she had turned the head of young Halled and of many an undergraduate besides. In Bath the young men were all at her feet, and not only the young men, as was natural, but the elder and less innocent members of



society. That the musician and his wife might have entertained hopes or even allowed themselves to be betrayed into not entirely unjustifiable schemings to marry their beautiful child to somebody who would raise her into a higher sphere, may well be believed. One such plan, indeed, it is evident did exist, which the poor girl herself foiled by making an artless confession to the man whom her parents had determined she should marry—"Mr. Long, an old gentleman of considerable fortune," who had the magnanimity to take upon himself the burden of breaking the engagement, and closed the indignant father's mouth by settling a little fortune of £3000 upon the young lady.

A danger escaped in this way, however, points to many other pitfalls among which her young feet had to tread, and one at least of a far more alarming kind has secured for itself a lasting place in her future husband's history. There is a curious letter<sup>1</sup> extant, which is printed in all Sheridan's biographies, and in which Eliza gives an account to a dear friend and confidant of the toils woven around her by one of her father's visitors, a certain Captain Matthews, who, though a married man and much older than herself, had beguiled the simple girl into a prolonged and clandestine sentimental correspondence. The sophisticated reader, glancing at this quaint production, without thought of the circumstances or the person, would probably conclude that there was harm in it, which it is very certain from all that is said and done besides did not exist; but the girl in her innocence evidently felt that the stolen intercourse, the whisperings aside, the man's prot-

<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Norton, in a preliminary sketch to an intended history of the Sheridans, never written, denies the authenticity of this letter with a somewhat ill-directed family pride; but no doubt has been thrown upon it by any of Sheridan's biographers.

estations of fondness, and despair if she withdrew from him, and her own half-flattered, half-frightened attraction towards him, were positive guilt. The letter, indeed, is Lydia Languish from beginning to end—the Lydia Languish of real life without any genius to trim her utterance into just as much as is needful and characteristic—and in consequence is somewhat tedious, long-winded, and confused; but her style, something between *Clarissa Harlowe* and *Julia Mannering*, is quite appropriate at once to the revelation and the period. The affair to which her letter refers has occupied far too much space, we think, in the story of Sheridan's life, yet it is a curious exposition of the time, the class, and the locality. The *Maid of Bath*, as she was called, had many adorers. Young *Halhed*, young *Charles Sheridan*—neither of them with much to offer—followed her steps wherever she moved, and applauded to the echo every note she sang, as did many another adorer; while within the busy and full house the middle-aged visitor, her father's so-called friend, had a hundred opportunities for a whispered word, a stolen caress, half permissible for the sake of old friendship, and because, no doubt, he had known her from a child. But even at sixteen the eyes of a girl accustomed to so many tributes would soon be opened, and the poor *Lydia* became alarmed by the warmth of her half-paternal lover and by the secrecy of his communications. This was her position at the time the *Sheridans* appear upon the scene.

The new influence immediately began to tell. *Miss Linley* and *Miss Sheridan* became devoted friends—and the two brothers “on our first acquaintance both professed to love me.” She gave them no hope “that I should ever look upon them in any other light than as brothers of my friend,” but yet “preferred the youngest,”

as "by far the most agreeable in person, beloved by every one, and greatly respected by all the better sort of people." Richard Sheridan, it would seem, immediately assumed the position of the young lady's secret guardian. He made friends with Matthews, became even intimate with him, and thus discovered the villanous designs which he entertained; while, on the other hand, he obtained the confidence of the lady, and became her chief adviser. It was a curious position for a young man—but he was very young, very poor, without any prospects that could justify him in entering the lists on his own account; and while he probably succeeded in convincing Miss Linley that his love for her was subdued into friendship, he seems to have been able to keep his secret from all his competitors, and not to have been suspected by any of them. In the heat of the persecution by Matthews, who resisted all her attempts to shake off his society, frightening her by such old-fashioned expedients as threatening his own life, and declaring that he could not live without seeing her, incessant consultations were necessary with the young champion who knew the secret, and whose advice and countenance were continually appealed to. No doubt they met daily in the ordinary course at each other's houses; but romance made it desirable that they should find a secret spot where Eliza could confide her troubles to Richard, and he warn her and encourage her in her resistance. "A grotto in Sydney Gardens" is reported to have been the scene of these meetings. On one occasion the anxious adviser must have urged his warnings too far, or insisted too warmly upon the danger of her position, for she left him angrily, resenting his interference; and this was the occasion of the verses addressed to Delia which he left upon the seat of the grotto for her, with an apparently well-justified but

somewhat rash confidence that they would fall into no other hands. In this, after celebrating the "moss-covered grotto of stone" and the dew-dripping willow that overshadows it, he unfolds the situation as follows :

"This is the grotto where Delia reclined,  
As late I in secret her confidence sought ;  
And this is the tree kept her safe from the wind,  
As, blushing, she heard the grave lesson I taught.

"Then tell me, thou grotto of moss-covered stone ;  
And tell me, thou willow with leaves dripping dew,  
Did Delia seem vexed when Horatio was gone,  
And did she confess her resentment to you ?

"Methinks now each bough as you're waving it tries  
To whisper a cause for the sorrow I feel,  
To hint how she frowned when I dared to advise,  
And sigh'd when she saw that I did it with zeal.

"True, true, silly leaves, so she did, I allow ;  
She frowned, but no rage in her looks did I see ;  
She frowned, but reflection had clouded her brow ;  
She sigh'd, but perhaps 'twas in pity for me.

\* \* \* \* \*

"For well did she know that my heart meant no wrong—  
It sank at the thought but of giving her pain ;  
But trusted its task to a faltering tongue,  
Which err'd from the feelings it could not explain.

"Yet oh ! if indeed I've offended the maid,  
If Delia my humble monition refuse,  
Sweet willow, the next time she visits thy shade,  
Fan gently her bosom, and plead its excuse.

"And thou, stony grot, in thy arch may'st preserve  
Two lingering drops of the night-fallen dew ;  
And just let them fall at her feet, and they'll serve  
As tears of my sorrow intrusted to you."

This is not very fine poetry; but it is very instructive as to the curious complication of affairs. It would not have suited Captain Absolute to play such a part; but Lydia Languish, amid all the real seriousness of the dilemma, no doubt would have derived a certain comfort from the romantic circumstances altogether—the villain, on one hand, threatening to lay his death at her door; the modest, self-suppressed adorer, on the other, devoting himself to her service; the long, confidential conferences in the dark and damp little shelter behind the willow; the verses left on the seat—nothing could have been more delightful to a romantic imagination.

But the excitement heightened as time went on; and the poor girl was so harassed and persecuted by the man whose suit was a scandal, that she tried at last, she tells us, to take poison, as the only way of escape for her, searching for and finding in Miss Sheridan's room a small phial of laudanum, which had been used for an aching tooth, and which was too small apparently to do any harm. After this tremendous evidence of her miserable state, Sheridan, who would seem to have confined himself hitherto to warnings and hints, now disclosed the full turpitude of Matthews's intentions, and showed her a letter in which the villain announced that he had determined to proceed to strong measures, and if he could not overcome her by pleadings meant to carry her off by force. "The moment I read this horrid letter I fainted, and it was some time before I could recover my senses sufficiently to thank Mr. Sheridan for opening my eyes." But the question now was, what was to be done? For the poor girl seems to have had no confidence in her father's power of protecting her, and probably knew the inexpediency of embroiling him with his patrons. The two young creatures laid

their foolish heads together in this crisis of fate—the girl thoroughly frightened, the youth full of chivalrous determination to protect her, and doubtless not without a hot-headed young lover's hope to turn it to his own advantage. He proposed that she should fly to France, and there take refuge in a convent till the danger should be over. His own family had left France only a few years before, and the sister, who was Eliza's friend, would recommend her to the kind nuns at St. Quentin, where she had herself been brought up. "He would go with me to protect me, and after he had seen me settled he would return to England and place my conduct in such a light that the world would applaud and not condemn me."

Such was the wonderful expedient by which the difficulties of this terrible crisis were surmounted. Her mother was ill and the house in great disorder, and under cover of the accidental commotion young Sheridan handed the agitated girl into a chair—his sister, who was in the secret, and, no doubt, in high excitement too, coming secretly to help her to pack up her clothes; and that night they posted off to London. "Sheridan had engaged the wife of one of his servants to go with me as a maid without my knowledge. You may imagine how pleased I was with his delicate behaviour." This last particular reaches the very heights of chivalry, for, no doubt, it must have been quite a different matter to the impassioned boy to conduct the flight with a commonplace matron seated in his post-chaise between him and his beautiful Delia, instead of the *tête-à-tête* which he might so easily have secured. Next day they crossed the Channel to the little sandy port of Dunkirk and were safe.

And it would seem that the rash young lover was very

honest and really meant to carry out this mad project; for she did eventually reach her convent, whither he attended her with punctilious respect. But when they were fairly launched upon their adventurous career either common sense or discreet acquaintances soon made it apparent to the young man that a youth and a maiden, however virtuous, cannot rove about the world in this way without comment, and that there was but one thing to be done in the circumstances. Perhaps Miss Linley had begun to feel something more than the mere "preference for the youngest," which she had so calmly announced, or perhaps it was only the desperate nature of the circumstances that made her yield. But, however that may be, the two fugitives went through the ceremony of marriage at Calais, though they seem to have separated immediately afterwards, carrying out the high sentimental and Platonic romance to the end.

It is a curious commentary, however, upon the prodigality of the penniless class to which Sheridan belonged that he could manage to start off suddenly upon this journey out of Thomas Sheridan's shifty household, where money was never abundant, a boy of twenty, with nothing of his own—hurrying up to London with post-horses, and hiring magnificently "the wife of one of his servants" to attend upon his love. The words suggest a retinue of retainers, and the journey itself would have taxed the resources of a youth much better endowed than Sheridan. Did he borrow, or run chivalrously into debt? or how did he manage it? His sister "assisted them with money out of her little fund for household expenses," but that would not go far. Perhaps the friend in London (a "respectable brandy-merchant") to whom he introduced Miss Linley as an heiress who had eloped with him, may have helped

on such a warrant to furnish the funds. But there is nothing more remarkable than the ease with which these impecunious gallants procure post-chaises, servants, and luxuries in those dashing days. The young men think nothing of a headlong journey from Bath to London and back again, which, notwithstanding all our increased facilities of locomotion, penniless youths of to-day would hesitate about. To be sure, it is possible that credit was to be had at the livery-stables, whereas, fortunately, none is possible at the railway-station. Post-horses seem to have been an affair of every day to the heroes of the Crescent and the Parade.

Meanwhile everything was left in commotion at home. Charles Sheridan, the elder brother, had left Bath and gone to the country in such dejection, after Miss Linley's final refusal of his addresses, as became a sentimental lover. When Richard went off triumphant with the lady his sisters were left alone, in great excitement and agitation; and their landlord, thinking the girls required "protection," according to the language of the time, set out at break of day to bring back the rejected from his retirement. The feelings of Charles on finding that his younger brother, whom even the girls did not know to be a lover of Miss Linley, had carried off the prize, may be imagined. But the occasion of the elopement, the designing villain of the piece—the profligate whose pursuit had driven the lady to despair—was furious. Miss Linley had, no doubt, left some explanation of the extraordinary step she was taking with her parents, and Sheridan appears to have taken the same precaution and disclosed the reasons which prompted her flight. When Matthews heard of this he published the following advertisement in a Bath newspaper :



“Mr. Richard S \* \* \* \* \* having attempted, in a letter left behind him for that purpose, to account for his scandalous method of running away from this place by insinuations derogatory to *my* character and that of a young lady innocent so far as relates to *me* or *my* knowledge; since which he has neither taken any notice of letters, or even informed his own family of the place where he has hid himself: I can no longer think he deserves the treatment of a gentleman, and therefore shall trouble myself no further about him than, in this public method, to post him as a L \* \* \* and a treacherous S \* \* \* \* \*

“And as I am convinced there have been many malevolent incendiaries concerned in the propagation of this infamous lie, if any of them, unprotected by age, infirmities, or profession, will dare to acknowledge the part they have acted, and affirm *to* what they have said *of* me, they may depend on receiving the proper reward of their villainy in the most public manner.”

This fire-eating paragraph was signed with the writer's name, and it may be imagined what a delightful commotion it made in such a metropolis of scandal and leisure, and with what excitement all the frequenters of the Pump-room and the assemblies looked for the next incident. Some weeks elapsed before they were satisfied, but the following event was striking enough to content the most sensational imagination. It would seem to have been April before a clue was found to the fugitives, and Linley started at once from Bath to recover his daughter. He found her, to his great relief, doubtless, in the house of an English doctor in Lisle, who had brought her there from her convent, and placed her under his wife's care to be nursed when she was ill. Everything, it was evident, had been done in honour, and the musician seems to have been so thankful to find things no worse that he took the young people's explanations in good part. He would even seem to have made some sort of conditional promise that she should no longer be compelled to perform in public after

she had fulfilled existing engagements, and so brought her back peacefully to Bath. Richard, who in the mean time, in his letters home, had spoken of his bride as Miss L., announcing her settlement in her convent, without the slightest intimation of any claim on his part upon her, seems to have returned with them; but no one, not even Miss Linley's father, was informed of the Calais marriage, which seems, in all good faith, to have been a form gone through in case any scandal should be raised, but at present meaning nothing more. And Bath, with all its scandal-mongers, at a period when the general imagination was far from delicate, seems to have accepted the escapade with a confidence in both the young people, and entire belief in their honour, which makes us think better both of the age and the town. We doubt whether such faith would be shown in the hero and heroine of a similar freak in our own day. Young Sheridan, however, came home to no peaceable reception. He had to meet his indignant brother, in the first place, and to settle the question raised by the insulting advertisement of Matthews, which naturally set his youthful blood boiling. Before his return to Bath he had seen this villain in London, who had the audacity to disclaim the advertisement and attribute it to Charles Sheridan—a suggestion which naturally brought the young man home furious. The trembling sisters, delighted to welcome Richard, and eager to know all about his adventure, had their natural sentiments checked by the gloomy looks with which the brothers met, and went to bed reluctantly that first evening, hearing the young men's voices high and angry, and anticipating with horror a quarrel between them. Next morning neither of them appeared. They had gone off again with those so-easily-obtained post-horses to London.

A terrible time of waiting ensued ; the distracted girls ran to the Linleys, but found no information there. They expected nothing better than to hear of a duel between their brothers for the too-charming Eliza's sake.

Hitherto all has been the genteelest of comedy, in fine eighteenth-century style: the villain intriguing, the ardent young lover stealing the lady out of his clutches, and Lydia Languish herself not without a certain delight in the romance, notwithstanding all her flutterings: the post-chaise dashing through the night, the alarms of the voyage, the curious innocent delusion of the marriage, complaisant priest and homely confidant, and guardian-bridegroom, with a soul above every ungenerous advantage. But the following act is wildly sensational. The account of the brawl that follows is given at length by all Sheridan's biographers. It is scarcely necessary to say that when the brothers, angry as both were, had mutually explained themselves, it was not to lift unnatural hands against each other that they sallied forth, while the girls lay listening and trembling up-stairs, but to jump once more into a post-chaise, and rattle over the long levels of the Bath road to town through the dewy chill of a May night, which did nothing, however, towards cooling their hot blood. Before leaving Bath, Richard had flashed forth a letter to the Master of the Ceremonies, informing him that Matthews's conduct had been such that no verbal apology could now be accepted from him. The first step the hero took on arriving in London was to challenge the villain, who, indeed, would seem to have behaved as infamously as the most boldly-drawn villain on the stage could be represented as doing. And then comes a most curious scene. The gentlemen with their rapiers go out to the Park, walking out together about six in the even-

ing—apparently a time when the Park was almost empty ; but on various pretences the offender declines to fight there, with an air of endeavouring to slip out of the risk altogether. After several attempts to persuade him to stand and draw, the party, growing more and more excited, at length go to a coffee-house, “The Castle Tavern, Henrietta Street”—having first called at two or three other places, where their heated looks would seem to have roused suspicion. Their march through the streets in the summer evening on this strange errand, each with his second, the very sword quivering at young Richard’s side and the blood boiling in his veins, among all the peaceful group streaming away from the Park, is wonderful to think of. When they got admittance at last to a private room in the tavern the following scene occurs :

“Mr. Ewart [the second of Sheridan] took lights up in his hand, and almost immediately on our entering the room we engaged. I struck Mr. Matthews’s point so much out of the line that I stepped up and caught hold of his wrist, or the hilt of his sword, while the point of mine was at his breast. You [the letter is addressed to the second on the other side] ran in and caught hold of my arm, exclaiming, ‘Don’t kill him!’ I struggled to disengage my arm, and said his sword was in my power. Mr. Matthews called out twice or thrice, ‘I beg my life.’ You immediately said ‘There ! he has begged his-life, and now there is an end of it ;’ and on Mr. Ewart’s saying that when his sword was in my power, as I attempted no more, you should not have interfered, you replied that you were wrong, but that you had done it hastily and to prevent mischief—or words to that effect. Mr. Matthews then hinted that I was rather obliged to your interposition for the advantage : you declared that before you did so both the swords were in Mr. Sheridan’s power. Mr. Matthews still seemed resolved to give it another turn, and observed that he had never quitted his sword. Provoked at this, I then swore (with too much heat, perhaps) that he should either give up his sword and I would break it, or go to his guard again. He refused—but on my

persisting either gave it into my hand, or flung it on the table or the ground (which, I will not absolutely affirm). I broke it and flung the hilt to the other end of the room. He exclaimed at this. I took a mourning sword from Mr. Ewart, and, presenting him with mine, gave my honour that what had passed should never be mentioned by me, and he might now right himself again. He replied that he 'would never draw a sword against the man that had given him his life;' but on his still exclaiming against the indignity of breaking his sword (which he brought upon himself), Mr. Ewart offered him the pistols, and some altercation passed between them. Mr. Matthews said that he could never show his face if it were known that his sword was broke—that such a thing had never been done—that it cancelled all obligations, etc. You seemed to think it was wrong, and we both proposed that if he never misrepresented the affair it should not be mentioned by us. This was settled. I then asked Mr. Matthews, as he had expressed himself sensible of and shocked at the injustice and indignity he had done me by his advertisement, whether it did not occur to him that he owed me another satisfaction; and that as it was now in his power to do it without discredit, I supposed he would not hesitate. This he absolutely refused, unless conditionally. I insisted on it, and said I would not leave the room till it was settled. After much altercation, and with much ill grace, he gave the apology."

There could not be a more curious scene. The outdoor duel is familiar enough both to fact and fiction; but the flash of the crossing swords, the sudden rush, the altercations of the angry group, the sullen submission of the disarmed bully, going on by the light of the flaring candles, in an inn-parlour, while the ordinary bustle of the tavern proceeded peacefully below, is as strange a picture as we can remember. Sheridan's account of the circumstances was made in answer to another, which stated them, as he asserts, falsely. The brothers returned home on Tuesday morning (they had left Bath on Saturday night), "much fatigued, not having been in bed since they left home," with Matthews's apology, and

triumph in their hearts, to the great consolation and relief of the anxious girls. But their triumph was not to be so easy. The circumstances of the duel oozed out, as most things do, and Matthews, stung by shame, challenged Sheridan again, choosing pistols as the weapons, *prior to swords*, "from a conviction that Mr. Sheridan would run in on him and an ungentlemanly scuffle probably be the consequence." This presentiment very evidently was justified; for the pistols were not used, and the duel ended in a violent scuffle—not like the usual dignified calm which characterises such deadly meetings. Matthews broke his sword upon Sheridan's ribs. The two antagonists fell together, Sheridan, wounded and bleeding, underneath, while the elder and heavier man punched at him with his broken sword. They were separated at length by the seconds, Sheridan refusing to "beg his life." He was carried home very seriously wounded, and, as was believed, in great danger. Miss Linley was singing at Oxford at the time, and while there Sheridan's wounded condition and the incident altogether was concealed from her, though everybody else knew of it and of her connection with it. When it was at last communicated to her she almost betrayed their secret, which even now nobody suspected, by a cry of "My husband! my husband!" which startled all who were present, but was set down to her excitement and distress, and presently forgotten.

This tremendous encounter closed the episode. Matthew had vindicated his courage and obliterated the stigma of the broken sword; and though there was at one moment a chance of a third duel, thenceforward we hear little more of him. Sheridan recovered slowly under the care of his sisters, his father and brother being again ab-

sent, and not very friendly. "We neither of us could approve of the cause in which you suffer," Charles writes. "All your friends here [in London] condemn you." The brother, however, has the grace to add that he is "unhappy at the situation I leave you in with respect to money matters," and that "Ewart was greatly vexed at the manner of your drawing for the last twenty pounds;" so that it seems the respectable brandy-merchant had been the family stand-by. The poor young fellow's position was miserable enough—badly wounded, without a shilling, his love seduously kept away from him, and the bond between them so strenuously ignored, that he promised his father, with somewhat guilty disingenuousness, that he never would marry Miss Linley. Life was altogether at a low ebb with him. When he got better he was sent into the country, to Waltham Abbey, no doubt by way of weaning him from all the seductions of Bath, and the vicinity of the lovely young singer, who had resumed her profession, though she hated it, and was to be seen of all men except the faithful lover who was her husband, though nobody knew.

Before we conclude this chapter of young life, which reads so like an argument to the *Rivals* or some similar play, we may indicate some of Sheridan's early productions which, common as the pretty art of verse-making was, showed something more than the facile knack of composition, which is one of what were entitled in that day "the elegant qualifications" of golden youth. Sacred to Eliza Linley, as well as the verses about "the moss-covered grotto," was the following graceful snatch of song, which is pretty enough to be got by heart and sung by love-sick youths in many generations to some pretty, *rococo* air as fantastic as itself:

“Dry be that tear, my gentlest love,  
 Be hush'd that struggling sigh;  
 Nor seasons, day, nor fate shall prove  
 More fix'd, more true than I.  
 Hush'd be that sigh, be dry that tear;  
 Cease boding doubt, cease anxious fear;  
 Dry be that tear.

“Ask'st thou how long my love will stay,  
 When all that's new is past?  
 How long, ah! Delia, can I say  
 How long my life will last?  
 Dry be that tear, be hush'd that sigh.  
 At least I'll love thee till I die.  
 Hush'd be that sigh.

“And does that thought affect thee too,  
 The thought of Sylvio's death,  
 That he who only breath'd for you  
 Must yield his faithful breath?  
 Hush'd be that sigh, be dry that tear,  
 Nor let us lose our heaven here.  
 Dry be that tear.”

Moore, with a pedantry which is sufficiently absurd, having just traced an expression in the “moss-covered grotto” to a classical authority, though with a doubt, very favourable to his own scholarship, “whether Sheridan was likely to have been a reader of Augurianus,” finds a close resemblance in the above to “one of the madrigals of Montreuil,” or perhaps to “an Italian song of Ménage.” Very likely it resembled all those pretty things, the *rococo* age being not yet over, and such elegant trifles still in fashion—as, indeed, they will always be as long as youth and its sweet follies last.

Other pretty bits of verse might be quoted, especially one which brings in another delightful literary association



into the story. Lady Margaret Fordyce—the beloved sister at whose departure from the old home in Fife Lady Anne Lindsay was so dejected, that to console herself she sang the woes, more plaintive still than her own, of that immortal peasant lass who married Auld Robin Gray—was then in Bath, and had been dismissed by a local versifier in his description of the beauties of the place by a couplet about a dimple, which roused young Sheridan's wrath. "Could you," he cries, addressing the poetaster—

"Could you really discover,  
In gazing those sweet beauties over,  
No other charm, no winning grace,  
Adorning either mind or face,  
But one poor dimple to express  
The quintessence of loveliness ?

"Mark'd you her cheek of rosy hue ?  
Mark'd you her eye of sparkling blue ?  
That eye in liquid circles moving,  
That cheek abash'd at man's approving ;  
The one Love's arrows darting round,  
The other blushing at the wound ;  
Did she not speak, did she not move,  
Now Pallas—now the Queen of Love ?"

The latter lines are often quoted, but it is pretty to know that it was of Lady Anne's Margaret that they were said.

It is probably also to his period of seclusion and leisure at Waltham that the early dramatic attempts found by Moore among the papers confided to him belong. One of these runs to the length of three acts, and is a work of the most fantastic description, embodying, so far as it goes, the life of a band of outlaws calling themselves Devils,

who have their head-quarters in a forest and keep the neighbourhood in alarm. The heroine, a mysterious and beautiful maiden, is secluded in a cave, from which she has never been allowed to go out, nor has she ever seen the face of man, except that of the old hermit, who is her guardian. She has been permitted, however, one glimpse of a certain young huntsman, whom she considers a phantom, until a second sight of him, when he is taken prisoner by the robbers, and unaccountably introduced into the cave where she lies asleep, convinces her of his reality, and naturally has the same effect upon her which the sudden apparition of Prince Ferdinand had upon Miranda. The scene is pretty enough as the work of a sentimental youth in an age addicted to the highflown everywhere, and especially on the stage. The hero, when unbound and left to himself, begins his soliloquy, as a matter of course, with a "Ha! where am I?" but changes his tone from despair to rapture when he sees the fair Reginilla whose acquaintance he had so mysteriously made. "Oh, would she but wake and bless this gloom with her bright eyes!" he says, after half a page. "Soft; here's a lute: perhaps her soul will know the call of harmony." Mrs. Radcliffe's lovely heroines, at a still later period, carried their lutes about with them everywhere, and tuned them to the utterance of a favourite copy of verses in the most terrible circumstances; so that the discovery of so handy an instrument in a robber's cave occasioned no surprise to the young hero. The song he immediately sung has been, Moore confesses, manipulated by himself. "I have taken the liberty of supplying a few rhymes and words that are wanting," he says, so that we need not quote it as an example of Sheridan. But the performance has its desired effect, and the lady wakes:

"*Reg. (waking).* The phantom, father! (*Seizes his hand.*) Oh, do not—do not wake me thus!

"*Huntsman (kneeling).* Thou beauteous sun of this dark world, that mak'st a place so like the cave of death a heaven to me, instruct me how I may approach thee—how address thee and not offend.

"*Reg.* Oh, how my soul could hang upon those lips! Speak on! And yet methinks he should not kneel. Why are you afraid, sir? Indeed I cannot hurt you.

"*Hunts.* Sweet innocence, I am sure thou would'st not.

"*Reg.* Art thou not he to whom I told my name, and did'st thou not say thine was—

"*Hunts.* Oh! blessed was the name that then thou told'st—it has been ever since my charm and kept me from distraction. But may I ask how such sweet excellence as thine could be hid in such a place?

"*Reg.* Alas! I know not—for such as thou I never saw before, nor any like myself.

"*Hunts.* Nor like thee ever shall; but would'st leave this place, and live with such as I am?

"*Reg.* Why may not you live here with such as I?

"*Hunts.* Yes, but I would carry thee where all above an azure canopy extends, at night bedropt with gems, and one more glorious lamp that yields such beautiful light as love enjoys; while underneath a carpet shall be spread of flowers to court the presence of thy step, with such sweet-whispered invitations from the leaves of shady groves or murmuring of silver streams, that thou shalt think thou art in Paradise.

"*Reg.* Indeed!

"*Hunts.* Ay, and I'll watch and wait on thee all day, and cull the choicest flowers, which while thou bind'st in the mysterious knot of love, I'll tune for thee no vulgar lays, or tell thee tales shall make thee weep, yet please thee, while thus I press thy hand, and warm it thus with kisses.

"*Reg.* I doubt thee not—but then my Governor has told me many a tale of faithless men, who court a lady but to steal her peace. . . . Then, wherefore could'st thou not live here? For I do feel, though tenfold darkness did surround this spot, I would be blest would you but stay here; and if it make you sad to be imprisoned thus, I'd sing and play for thee, and dress thee sweetest fruits, and though

you chide me would kiss thy tears away, and hide my blushing face upon thy bosom; indeed I would. Then what avails the gaudy days, and all the evil things I'm told inhabit them, to those who have within themselves all that delight and love and heaven can give?

"*Hunts.* My angel, thou hast indeed the soul of love.

"*Reg.* It is no ill thing, is it?

"*Hunts.* Oh, most divine—it is the immediate gift of heaven—"

And then the lute is brought into requisition once more. Other scenes of a much less superfine description, in one of which the hero takes the semblance of a dancing bear, go on outside this sentimental retirement; and some humour is expended on the trial of various prisoners secured by the robbers, who are made to believe that they have left this world and are being brought up before a kind of Pluto for judgment. This inflexible judge orders "baths of flaming sulphur and the caldron of boiling lead" for one who confesses himself to have been a courtier. The culprit's part, however, is taken by a compassionate devil, who begs that he may be soaked a little first in scalding brimstone, to prepare him for his final sentence.

Another unfinished sketch called the *Foresters* deals with effects not quite so violent. To the end of life Sheridan would threaten smilingly to produce this play and outdo everything else with it, but the existing framework seems to have been of the very slightest. Probably to a much later period belongs the projected play upon the subject of *Affectation*, for which were intended many memorandums found written upon the paper books in which his thoughts were noted. The subject is one which, in the opinion of various critics, would have been specially adapted to Sheridan's powers, and Moore, and many others following him, express regret that it should have been abandoned. But no doubt Sheridan's instinct warned him that on no such

set plan could his faculties work, and that the stage, however adapted to the display of individual eccentricities, wants something more than a bundle of embodied *fads* to make its performances tell. Sir Bubble Bon, Sir Peregrine Paradox, the representative “man who delights in hurry and interruption,” the “man intriguing only for the reputation of it,” the “lady who affects poetry,” and all the rest, do well enough for the table-talk of the imagination, or even to jot down and play with in a note-book; but Sheridan was better inspired than to attempt to make them into a play. He had already among these memorandums of his the first ideas of almost all his future productions, the primitive notes afterwards to be developed into the brilliant malice of the scandalmongers, the first conception of old Teazle, the earliest adumbration of the immortal Puff. But the little verses which we have already quoted were the best of his actual achievements at this early period, dictated as they were by the early passion which made the careless boy into a man.

At least one other poetical address of a similar description—stilted, yet not without a tender breath of pastoral sweetness—was addressed to Eliza after she became Sheridan’s wife, and told how Silvio reclined upon “Avon’s ridgy bank”—

“Did mock the meadow’s flowing pride,  
 Rail’d at the dawn and sportive ring;  
 The tabour’s call he did deride,  
 And said, It was not Spring.

“He scorned the sky of azure blue,  
 He scorned whate’er could mirth bespeak;  
 He chid the beam that drank the dew,  
 And chid the gale that fanned his glowing cheek.  
 Unpaid the season’s wonted lay,  
 For still he sighed and said, It was not May.”

Which is, of course, explained by the circumstance that Delia (for the nonce called Laura) was not there. Laura responded in verses not much worse. It was a pretty commerce, breathing full of the time when shepherds and shepherdesses were still the favourites of dainty poetry—a fashion which seems in some danger of returning with the other quaintnesses of the time. But this was after the young pair were united; and in 1772, when he had recovered of his wounds, and was making what shift he could to occupy himself in the solitude of Waltham, studying a little for a variety, reading up the History of England and the works of Sir William Temple, by way of improving his mind, that blessed event seemed distant and unlikely enough.

In the Lent of 1773 Miss Linley came to London, to sing in the oratorios, and it is said that young Sheridan resorted to the most romantic expedients to see her. He was near enough to “tread on the heels of perilous probabilities”—a phrase which Moore quotes from one of his letters—and is said to have come from Waltham to London, and to have disguised himself as a hackney coachman, and driven her home from her performances on several occasions. The anonymous author of *Sheridan and his Times* asserts that on one of these occasions, by some accident, the lady was alone, and that this opportunity of communication led to a series of meetings, which at length convinced the parents that further resistance was hopeless. During all this time, it would appear, the marriage at Calais was never referred to, and was thought nothing of, even by the parties most concerned. It was intended apparently as a safeguard to Delia's reputation should need occur, but as nothing more; which says a great deal for the romantic generosity of so ardent a lover and so penni-

less a man. For Delia had her little fortune, besides all the other charms which spoke so much more eloquently to her Silvio's heart, and was indeed a liberal income in herself, to any one who would take advantage of it, with that lovely voice of hers. But the young man was romantically magnanimous and highflying in his sense of honour. He was indeed a very poor match—a youth without a penny, even without a profession, and no visible means of living—for the adored siren, about whom wealthy suitors were dangling by the dozen, no doubt exciting many anxious hopes in the breasts of her parents, if not in her own faithful bosom. But love conquered in the long run, as an honest and honourable sentiment, if it lasts and can wait, is pretty sure to do. In April, 1773, about a year from the time of their clandestine marriage at Calais, they were married in the eye of day, with all that was needful to make the union dignified and respectable; and thus the bustling little romance, so full of incident, so entirely ready for the use of the drama, so like all the favourite stage-combinations of the time, came to an end. We do not hear very much of Mrs. Sheridan afterwards; indeed, except the letter to which we have referred, she does little to disclose her personality at any time, but there is something engaging and attractive—a sort of faint but sweet reflection—raying out from her through all her life. The Lydia Languish of early days—the sentimental and romantic heroine of so many persecutions and pursuits, of the midnight flight and secret marriage—developed into one of those favourites of society, half-artist, half-fine-lady, whose exertions for the amusement of the world bring nothing to them but a half-fictitious position and dangerous flatteries, without even the public singer's substantial reward—a class embracing many charming and attractive

women, victims of their own gifts and graces. Mrs. Sheridan was, however, at the same time—at least, in all the early part of her career—a devoted wife, and seems to have done her best for her brilliant husband, and formed no small item in his success as well as in his happiness as long as her existence lasted. It is said that she disliked the life of a singer, and it is certain that she acquiesced in his resolution to withdraw her from all public appearances; but even in that point it is very likely that there was some unconsidered sacrifice in her submission. “Hers was truly a voice as of the church choir,” says a contemporary quoted by Moore, “and she was always ready to sing without any pressing. She sang here a great deal, and to my infinite delight; but what had a peculiar charm was, that she used to take my daughter, then a child, on her lap, and sing a number of childish songs with such a playfulness of manner and such a sweetness of look and voice as was quite enchanting.”



## CHAPTER II.

### HIS FIRST DRAMATIC WORKS.

MARRIED at last and happy, after so much experience of disappointment and hope deferred, Sheridan and his young wife took a cottage in the country, and retired there to enjoy their long-wished-for life together, and to consider an important, but it would seem not absolutely essential, point—what they were to do for their living. Up to this point they have been so entirely the personages of a drama, that it is quite in order that they should retire to a rose-covered cottage, with nothing particular to live upon; and that the young husband, though without any trade of his own by which he could earn a dinner, should magnificently waive off all offers of employment for his wife, who had a trade—and a profitable one. He was still but twenty-two and she nineteen, and he had hitherto managed to get all that was necessary, besides post-chaises and a considerable share of the luxuries of the time, as the lilies get their bravery, without toiling or spinning; so that it is evident the young man confronted fate with very little alarm, and his proud attitude of family head and master of his own wife is in the highest degree edifying as well as amusing. We can scarcely help doubting greatly whether a *prima donna* even of nineteen would let herself be disposed of now by such an absolute authority. The

tone of the letter in which he communicates to his father-in-law his lofty determination in this respect will show the young men of to-day the value of the privileges which they have, it is to be feared, partially resigned :

“ Yours of the 3d instant did not reach me till yesterday, by reason of its missing us at Morden. As to the principal point it treats of, I had given my answer some days ago to Mr. Isaac, of Worcester. He had enclosed a letter from Storace to my wife, in which he dwells much on the nature of the agreement you had made for her eight months ago, and adds that ‘as this is no new application, but a request that you (Mrs. S.) will fulfil a positive engagement, the breach of which would prove of fatal consequence to our meeting, I hope Mr. Sheridan will think his honour in some degree concerned in fulfilling it.’ Mr. Storace, in order to enforce Mr. Isaac’s argument, showed me his letter on the same subject to him, which begins with saying, ‘We must have Mrs. Sheridan somehow or other if possible, the plain English of which is that if her husband is not willing to let her perform, we will persuade him that he acts *dishonourably* in preventing her from fulfilling a positive engagement.’ This I conceive to be the very worst mode of application that could have been taken; as there really is not common-sense in the idea that my *honour* can be concerned in my wife’s fulfilling an engagement which it is impossible she should ever have made. Nor (as I wrote to Mr. Isaac) can you who gave the promise, whatever it was, be in the least charged with the breach of it, as your daughter’s marriage was an event which must always have been looked to by them as quite as natural a period to your rights over her as her death. And in my opinion it would have been just as reasonable to have applied to you to fulfil your engagement in the latter case than in the former. As to the imprudence of declining this engagement, I do not think, even were we to suppose that my wife should ever on any occasion appear again in public, there would be the least at present. For instance, I have had a gentleman with me from Oxford (where they do not claim the least right as from an engagement) who has endeavoured to place the idea of my complimenting the University with Betsey’s performance in the strongest light of advantage to me. This he said on my declining to let her perform on any agreement. He likewise

informed me that he had just left Lord North (the Chancellor), who, he assured me, would look upon it as the highest compliment, and had expressed himself so to him. Now, should it be a point of inclination or convenience to me to break my resolution with regard to Betsey's performing, there surely would be more sense in obliging Lord North (and probably from his own application) than Lord Coventry and Mr. Isaac; for were she to sing at Worcester, there would not be the least compliment in her performing at Oxford."

The poor pretty wife, smiling passive in the background while my young lord considers whether he will "compliment the University" with her performance, is a spectacle which ought to be impressive to the brides of the present day, who take another view of their position; but there is a delightful humour in this turning of the tables upon the stern father who had so often snubbed young Sheridan, and who must have regarded, one would suppose, his present impotence and the sublime superiority of the new proprietor of Betsey with anything but pleasant feelings. Altogether the attitude of the group is very instructive in view of the changes of public opinion on this point. The most arbitrary husband nowadays would think it expedient at least to associate his wife's name with his own in any such refusal; but the proprietorship was undoubting in Sheridan's day. It will be remembered that Dr. Johnson highly applauded the young gentleman's spirit and resolution in this point.

However, though she had so soon become Betsey and his property, so far as business was concerned, the cottage at East Burnham, among the beech-trees and roses, still contained a tender pair of lovers; and Silvio still addressed to Delia the sweetest compliments in verse. When he is absent he appeals to Hymen to find something for him to do to make the hours pass when away from her:

“Alas! thou hast no wings, oh, Time;  
 It was some thoughtless lover’s rhyme,  
 Who, writing in his Chloe’s view,  
 Paid her the compliment through you.  
 For had he, if he truly lov’d,  
 But once the pangs of absence prov’d,  
 He’d cropt thy wings, and in their stead  
 Have painted thee with heels of lead.”

Thus Betsey’s chains were gilded; and in all likelihood she was totally unconscious of them, never having been awakened to any right of womankind beyond that of being loved and flattered. The verse is not of very high quality, but the sentiment is charming, and entirely appropriate to the position:

“For me who, when I’m happy, owe  
 No thanks to Fortune that I’m so,  
 Who long have learn’d to look at one  
 Dear object, and at one alone,  
 For all the joy and all the sorrow  
 That gilds the day or threatens the morrow.  
 I never felt thy footsteps light  
 But when sweet love did aid thy flight,  
 And banished from his blest dominion,  
 I car’d not for thy borrowed pinion.  
 True, she is mine; and since she’s mine  
 At trifles I should not repine;  
 But, oh! the miser’s real pleasure  
 Is not in knowing he has treasure;  
 He must behold his golden store,  
 And feel and count his riches o’er.  
 Thus I, of one dear gem possess,  
 And in that treasure only blest,  
 There every day would seek delight,  
 And clasp the casket every night.”

The condition of the young pair in any reasonable point of view at this beginning of their life was as little hopeful

as can be conceived. The three thousand pounds left to Miss Linley by Mr. Long was their sole fortune, if it still remained intact. The wife was rendered helpless by the husband's grand prohibition of her exertions, and he himself had nothing to do, nor knew how to do anything; for even to literature, that invariable refuge, he scarcely seems as yet to have turned his eyes with any serious intent. The manner in which they plunged into life, however, is characteristic. When winter made their Burnham cottage undesirable, and the time of honey-mooning was well over, they went to town to live with the composer Storace, where no doubt Betsey's talent was largely exercised, though not in public, and probably helped to make friends for the young pair; for we hear of them next year as paying visits, among other places, at the house of Canning; and in the winter of 1774 they established themselves in Orchard Street, Portman Square, in a house of their own, furnished, an anonymous biographer says, "in the most costly style," at the expense of Linley, with perhaps some contribution from that inexhaustible three thousand pounds:

"His house was open," says this historian, "for the reception of guests of quality attracted by his wit, the superior accomplishments of his wife, and the elegance of his entertainments. His dinners were upon the most expensive scale, his wines of the finest quality; while Mrs. Sheridan's *soirées* were remarkable not more for their brilliance than the gay groups of the most beautiful, accomplished, and titled lady visitants of the Court of St. James. Mrs. Sheridan's routs were the great attraction of the season. A friend—a warm and sincere friend—remonstrating with Sheridan on the instability of his means of supporting such a costly establishment, he tersely replied, 'My dear friend, it is my means.'"

Such a description will be taken for what it is worth, but there seems internal evidence that the anecdote with

which it concludes might have been true. And certainly, for a young man beginning the arduous occupation of living on his wits, a pretty house and prettier wife and good music would form an excellent stock-in-trade; and the new home itself being entirely beyond any visible means they had, every other prodigality would be comprehensible. By this time he had begun the composition of a play, and considered himself on the eve of publishing a book, which, he "thinks, will do me some credit," as he informs his father-in-law, but which has never been heard of from that time to this, so far as appears. Another piece of information contained in the letter in which this apocryphal work is announced shows for the first time a better prospect for the young adventurer. He adds, "There will be a comedy of mine in rehearsal at Covent Garden within a few days":

"I have done it at Mr. Harris's (the manager's) own request: it is now complete in his hands, and preparing for the stage. He and some of his friends also who have heard it assure me in the most flattering terms that there is not a doubt of its success. It will be very well played, and Harris tells me that the least shilling I shall get (if it succeeds) will be six hundred pounds. I shall make no secret of it towards the time of representation, that it may not lose any support my friends can give it. I had not written a line of it two months ago, except a scene or two, which I believe you have seen in an odd act of a little farce."

This was the *Rivals*, which was performed at Covent Garden, on the 17th of January, 1775—nearly three years after his marriage. How he existed in the meantime, and made friends and kept up his London house, is left to the imagination. Probably it was done upon that famous three thousand pounds, which appears, like the widow's cruse, to answer all demands.

The *Rivals* was not successful the first night, and the hopes of the young dramatist must have met with a terrible check; but the substitution of one actor for another in the part of Sir Lucius O'Trigger, and such emendations as practical sense suggested as soon as it had been put on the stage, secured for it one continued triumph ever after. It is now more than a century since critical London watched the new comedy, and the hearts of the Linleys thrilled from London to Bath, and old Thomas Sheridan, still unreconciled to his son, came, silent and sarcastic, to the theatre to see what the young good-for-nothing had made of it; but the world has never changed its opinion. What a moment for Betsey in the house where she had everything that heart of woman could desire except the knowledge that all was honest and paid for—a luxury which outdoes all the rest—and for her husband, standing in the wings, watching his father's face, whom he dared not go and speak to, and knowing that his whole future hung in the balance, and that in case of success all his follies would be justified! “But now there can be no doubt of its success,” cries little Miss Linley from Bath, in a flutter of excitement, “as it has certainly got through more difficulties than any comedy which has not met its doom the first night.” The Linleys were convinced in their own minds that it was Mrs. Sheridan who had written “the much admired epilogue.” “How I long to read it!” cries the little sister. “What makes it more certain is that my *father* guessed it was *yours* the first time he saw it praised in the paper.” There is no reason to suppose that the guess was true, but it is a pretty exhibition of family feeling.

The *Rivals*—to the ordinary spectator who, looking on with uncritical pleasure at the progress of that episode of mimic life, in which everybody's remarks are full of such

a quintessence of wit as only a very few remarkable persons are able to emulate in actual existence, accepts the piece for the sake of these and other qualities—is so little like a transcript from any actual conditions of humanity that to consider it as studied from the life would be absurd, and we receive these creations of fancy as belonging to a world entirely apart from the real. But the reader who has accompanied Sheridan through the previous chapter of his history will be inclined, on the contrary, to feel that the young dramatist has but selected a few incidents from the still more curious comedy of life in which he himself had so recently been one of the actors, and in which elopements, duels, secret correspondences, and all the rest of the simple-artificial round, were the order of the day. Whether he drew his characters from the life it is needless to inquire, or if there was an actual prototype for Mrs. Malaprop. Nothing, however, in imagination is so highly fantastical as reality; and it is very likely that some two or three ladies of much pretension and gentility flourished upon the parade and frequented the Pump-room, from whose conversation her immortal parts of speech were appropriated; but this is of very little importance in comparison with the delightful success of the result. The *Rivals* is no such picture of life in Bath as that which, half a century later, in altered times, which yet were full of humours of their own, Miss Austen made for us in all the modest flutter of youthful life and hopes. Sheridan's brilliant dramatic sketch is slight in comparison, though far more instantly effective, and with a concentration in its sharp effects which the stage requires. But yet, no doubt, in the bustle and hurry of the successive arrivals, in the eager brushing up of the countryman new-launched on such a scene, and the aspect of the idle yet bustling



society, all agog for excitement and pleasure, the brisk little holiday city was delightfully recognisable in the eyes of those to whom "the Bath" represented all those vacation rambles and excursions over the world which amuse our leisure now. Scarcely ever was play so full of liveliness and interest constructed upon a slighter machinery. The Rivals of the title, by means of the most simple yet amusing of mystifications, are one person. The gallant young lover, who is little more than the conventional type of that well-worn character, but a manly and lively one, has introduced himself to the romantic heroine in the character of Ensign Beverley, a poor young subaltern, instead of his own much more eligible personality as the heir of Sir Anthony Absolute, a baronet with four thousand a year, and has gained the heart of the sentimental Lydia, who prefers love in a cottage to the finest settlements, and looks forward to an elopement and the loss of a great part of her fortune with delight: when his plans are suddenly confounded by the arrival of his father on the scene, bent on marrying her forthwith in his own character to the same lady. Thus he is at the same time the romantic and adored Beverley and the detested Captain Absolute in her eyes; and how to reconcile her to marrying peaceably and with the approval of all her belongings, instead of clandestinely and with all the *éclat* of a secret running away, is the problem. This, however, is solved precipitately by the expedient of a duel with the third rival, Bob Acres, which shows the fair Lydia that the safety of her Beverley, even if accompanied by the congratulations of friends and a humdrum marriage, is the one thing to be desired. Thus the whole action of the piece turns upon a mystification, which affords some delightfully comic scenes, but few of those occasions of sus-

pense and uncertainty which give interest to the drama. This we find in the brisk and delightful movement of the piece, in the broad but most amusing sketches of character, and the unfailing wit and sparkle of the dialogue. In fact, we believe that many an audience has enjoyed the play, and, what is more wonderful, many a reader laughed over it in private, without any clear realisation of the story at all, so completely do Sir Anthony's fits of temper, and Mrs. Malaprop's fine language and stately presence, and the swagger of Bob Acres, occupy and amuse us. Even Faulkland, the jealous and doubting, who invents a new misery for himself at every word, and finds an occasion for wretchedness even in the smiles of his mistress, which are always either too cold or too warm for him, is so laughable in his starts aside at every new suggestion of jealous fancy, that we forgive him not only a great deal of fine language, but the still greater drawback of having nothing to do with the action of the piece at all.

Mrs. Malaprop's ingenious "derangement of epitaphs" is her chief distinction to the popular critic; and even though such a great competitor as Dogberry has occupied the ground before her, those delightful absurdities have never been surpassed. But justice has hardly been done to the individual character of this admirable if broad sketch of a personage quite familiar in such scenes as that which Bath presented a century ago, the plausible, well-bred woman, with a great deal of vanity, and no small share of good-nature, whose inversion of phrases is quite representative of the blurred realisation she has of surrounding circumstances, and who is quite sincerely puzzled by the discovery that she is not so well qualified to enact the character of Delia as her niece would be. Mrs. Malaprop has none of the harshness of Mrs. Hardcastle, in *She*

*Stoops to Conquer*, and we take it unkind of Captain Absolute to call her "a weatherbeaten she-dragon." The complacent nod of her head, the smirk on her face, her delightful self-satisfaction and confidence in her "parts of speech," have nothing repulsive in them. No doubt she imposed upon Bob Acres; and could Catherine Morland and Mrs. Allen have seen her face and heard her talk, these ladies would, we feel sure, have been awed by her presence. And she is not unkind to Lydia, though the minx deserves it, and has no desire to appropriate her fortune. She smiles upon us still in many a watering-place—large, gracious, proud of her conversational powers, always a delightful figure to meet with, and filling the shop-keeping ladies with admiration. Sir Anthony, though so amusing on stage, is more conventional, since we know he must get angry presently whenever we meet him, although his coming round again is equally certain; but Mrs. Malaprop is never quite to be calculated upon, and is always capable of a new simile as captivating as that of the immortal "allegory on the banks of the Nile."

The other characters, though full of brilliant talk, cleverness, and folly, have less originality. The country hobledehoy, matured into a dandy and braggart by his entrance into the intoxicating excitement of Bath society, is comical in the highest degree; but he is not characteristically human. While Mrs. Malaprop can hold her ground with Dogberry, Bob Acres is not fit to be mentioned in the same breath with the "exquisite reasons" of that delightful knight, Sir Andrew Aguecheek. And thus it becomes at once apparent that Sheridan's eye for a situation, and the details that make up a striking combination on the stage, was far more remarkable than his insight into human motives and action. There is no scene on the

stage which retains its power of amusing an ordinary audience more brilliantly than that of the proposed duel, where the wittiest of boobies confesses to feeling his valour ooze out at his finger-ends, and the fire-eating Sir Lucius promises, to console him, that he shall be pickled and sent home to rest with his fathers, if not content with the snug lying in the abbey. The two men are little more than symbols of the slightest description, but their dialogue is instinct with wit, and that fun, the most English of qualities, which does not reach the height of humour, yet overwhelms even gravity itself with a laughter in which there is no sting or bitterness. Molière sometimes attains this effect, but rarely, having too much meaning in him; but with Shakspeare it is frequent amongst higher things. And in Sheridan this gift of innocent ridicule and quick embodiment of the ludicrous without malice or *arrière-pensée* reaches to such heights of excellence as have given his nonsense a sort of immortality.

It is, however, difficult to go far in discussion or analysis of a literary production which attempts no deeper investigation into human nature than this. Sheridan's art, from its very beginning, was theatrical, if we may use the word, rather than dramatic. It aimed at strong situations and highly effective scenes rather than at a finely constructed story, or the working out of either plot or passion. There is nothing to be discovered in it by the student, as in those loftier dramas which deal with the higher qualities and developments of the human spirit. It is possible to excite a very warm controversy in almost any company of ordinarily educated people at any moment upon the character of Hamlet. And criticism will always find another word to say even upon the less profound but delightful mysteries of such a poetical creation

as Rosalind, all glowing with ever varied life and love and fancy. But the lighter drama with which we have now to deal hides no depths under its brilliant surface. The pretty, fantastical Lydia, with her romances, her impatience of ordinary life, her hot little spark of temper, was new to the stage, and when she finds a fitting representative can be made delightful upon it; but there is nothing further to find out about her. The art is charming, the figures full of vivacity, the touch that sets them before us exquisite: except, indeed, in the Faulkland scenes, probably intended as a foil for the brilliancy of the others, in which Julia's magnificent phrases are too much for us, and make us deeply grateful to Sheridan for the discrimination which kept him—save in one appalling instance—from the serious drama. But there are no depths to be sounded, and no suggestions to be carried out. While, however, its merits as literature are thus lessened, its attractions as a play are increased. There never was a comedy more dear to actors, as there never was one more popular on the stage. The even balance of its characters, the equality of the parts, scarcely one of them being quite insignificant, and each affording scope enough for a good player to show what is in him, must make it always popular in the profession. It is, from the same reason, the delight of amateurs.

Moore quotes from an old copy of the play a humorous dedication written by Tickell, Sheridan's brother-in-law, to Indolence. "There is a propriety in prefixing your name to a work begun entirely at your suggestion and finished under your auspices," Tickell says; and, notwithstanding his biographer's attempt to prove that Sheridan polished all he wrote with extreme care, and cast and recast his literary efforts, there is an air of ease and lightness in his

earlier work which makes the dedication sufficiently appropriate. It must have amused his own fancy while he wrote, as it has amused his audience ever since. It is the one blossom of production which had yet appeared in so many easy years. A wide margin of leisure, of pleasure, of facile life, extends around it. It was done quickly, it appears, when once undertaken—a pleasing variety upon the featureless course of months and years. The preface which Sheridan himself prefixed to the play when printed justifies itself on the score that “the success of the piece has probably been founded on a circumstance which the author is informed has not before attended a theatrical trial”:

“I need scarcely add that the circumstance alluded to was the withdrawing of the piece to remove these imperfections in the first representation which were too obvious to escape reprehension, and too numerous to admit of a hasty correction. . . . It were unnecessary to enter into any further extenuation of what was thought exceptionable in this play, but that it has been said that the managers should have prevented some of the defects before its appearance to the public—and, in particular, the uncommon length of the piece as represented the first night. It were an ill return for the most liberal and gentlemanly conduct on their side to suffer any censure to rest where none was deserved. Hurry in writing has long been exploded as an excuse for an author; however, in the dramatic line, it may happen that both an author and a manager may wish to fill a chasm in the entertainment of the public with a hastiness not altogether culpable. The season was advanced when I first put the play into Mr. Harris’s hands; it was at that time at least double the length of any acting comedy. I profited by his judgment and experience in the curtailment of it, till I believe his feeling for the vanity of a young author got the better of his desire for correctness, and he left so many excrescences remaining because he had assisted in pruning so many more. Hence, though I was not uninformed that the acts were still too long, I flattered myself that after the first trial I might with safer judgment proceed to remove what should appear to have been most dissatisfactory.”

These were, it is true, days of leisure, when nothing was pushed and hurried on, as now. But it would require, one would think, no little firmness and courage on the part of a young author to risk the emendation of errors so serious after an unfavourable first-night, and a great confidence on the part of the manager to permit such an experiment. But there are some men who impress all around them with such a certainty of power and success, that even managers dare, and publishers volunteer, in their favour. Sheridan was evidently one of these men. There was an atmosphere of triumph about him. He had carried off his siren from all competitors; he had defied all inducements to give her up to public hearing after; he had flown in the face of prudence and every frugal tradition. And, so far as an easy and happy life went, he was apparently succeeding in that attempt. So he was allowed to take his unsuccessful comedy off the stage and trim it into his own guise of triumph. We are not told how long the interval was, which would have been instructive (the anonymous biographer says "a few days"). It was produced in January, however, and a month later we hear of it in preparation at Bath, where its success was extraordinary. The same witness, whom we have just quoted, adds that "Sheridan's prospective six hundred pounds was more than doubled by its success and the liberality of the manager."

He had thus entered fully upon his career as a dramatist. In the same year he wrote—in gratitude, it is said, to the Irish actor who had saved the *Rivals* by his felicitous representation of Sir Lucius—the farce called *St. Patrick's Day; or, the Scheming Lieutenant*, a very slight production, founded on the tricks, so familiar to comedy, of a lover's ingenuity to get entrance into the house of

his mistress. The few opening sentences, which are entirely characteristic of Sheridan, are almost the best part of the production: they are spoken by a party of soldiers coming with a complaint to their officer:

“*1st Sol.* I say, you are wrong; we should all speak together, each for himself, and all at once, that we may be heard the better.

“*2d Sol.* Right, Jack; we'll argue in platoons.

“*3d Sol.* Ay, ay, let him have our grievances in a volley.”

The lieutenant, whose suit is scorned by the parents of his Lauretta, contrives, by the aid of a certain Dr. Rosy, a comic, but not very comic, somewhat long-winded personage, to get into the house of Justice Credulous, her father, as a servant; but is discovered and turned out. He then writes a letter asserting that, in his first disguise, he has given the Justice poison, an assertion which is met with perfect faith; upon which he comes in again as the famous quack doctor, so familiar to us in the pages of Molière. In this case the quack is a German, speaking only a barbarous jargon, but he speedily cures the Justice, on condition of receiving the hand of his daughter. “Did he say all that in so few words?” cries Justice Credulous, when one of the stranger's utterances is explained to him. “What a fine language it is!”—just as M. Jourdain delightedly acknowledged the eloquence of *la langue Turque*, which could express *tant de choses dans un seul mot*. The *Scheming Lieutenant* still keeps its ground among Sheridan's works, bound up between the *Rivals* and the *School for Scandal*, a position in which one cannot help feeling it must be much astonished to find itself.

In the end of the year the opera of the *Duenna* was also produced at Covent Garden. The praise and immediate appreciation with which it was received were still



greater than those that hailed the *Rivals*. "The run of this opera has, I believe, no parallel in the annals of the drama," says Moore, speaking in days when the theatre had other rules than those known among ourselves. "Sixty-three nights was the career of the *Beggar's Opera*; but the *Duenna* was acted no less than seventy-five times during the season," and the enthusiasm which it called forth was general. It was pronounced better than the *Beggar's Opera*, up to that time acknowledged to be the first and finest production of the never very successful school of English opera. Opera at all was as yet an exotic in England, and the public still resented the importation of Italian music and Italian singers to give it utterance, and fondly clung to the idea of being able to produce as good or better at home. The *Duenna* was a joint work, in which Sheridan was glad to associate with himself his father-in-law, Linley, whose airs to the songs, which were plentifully introduced—and which gave its name to what is in reality a short comedy on the lines of Molière, interspersed with songs, and not an opera in the usual sense of the word at all—were much commended at the time. The little lyrics which are put indiscriminately into the mouths of the different personages are often extremely pretty; but few people in these days have heard them sung, though lines from the verses are still familiar enough to our ears in the way of quotation. The story of the piece belongs to the same easy, artificial inspiration which dictated the trivial plot of *St. Patrick's Day*, and of so many others. It is "mainly founded," says Moore, "upon an incident borrowed from the *Country Wife* of Wycherley," but it seems hardly necessary to seek a parent for so *banal* a contrivance. The father, with whom we are all so familiar, has to be tricked out of his daughter by one of the monotonous lovers with

whom we are more familiar still; but instead of waiting till her gallant shall invent a plan for this purpose, the lady cuts the knot herself, by the help of her duenna, who has no objection to marry the rich Jew whom Louisa abhors, and who remains in the garb of her young mistress, while the latter escapes in the duenna's hood and veil. The Portuguese Isaac from whom the lady flies is a crafty simpleton, and when he finds the old duenna waiting for him under the name of Louisa (whom her father, for the convenience of the plot, has vowed never to see till she is married) he accepts her, though much startled by her venerable and unlovely appearance, as the beautiful creature who has been promised to him, with only the rueful reflection to himself, "How blind some parents are!" and, as she explains that she also has made a vow never to accept a husband from her father's hands, carries her off, as she suggests, with much simplicity and the astute reflection, "If I take her at her word I secure her fortune and avoid making any settlement in return." In the meantime two pairs of interesting lovers, Louisa and her Antonio, her brother Ferdinand and his Clara, are wandering about in various disguises, with a few quarrels and reconciliations, and a great many songs, which they pause to sing at the most inappropriate moments, after the fashion of opera. In order to be married—which all are anxious to be—Isaac and one of the young gallants go to a "neighbouring monastery," such establishments being delightfully handy in Seville, where the scene is laid; and the hot Protestantism of the audience is delighted by an ecclesiastical interior, in which "Father Paul, Father Francis, and other friars are discovered at a table drinking," singing convivial songs, and promising to remember their penitents in their cups, which will do quite as much good as masses. Father Paul

is the supposed ascetic of the party, and comes forward when called with a glass of wine in his hand, chiding them for having disturbed his devotions. The three couples are then married by this worthy functionary, and the whole ends with a scene at the house of the father, when the trick is revealed to him, and, amid general blessings and forgiveness, the Jew discovers that he has married the penniless duenna instead of the lady with a fortune, whom he has helped to deceive himself as well as her father. The duenna, who has been, like all the old ladies in these plays, the subject of a great many unmannerly remarks—when an old woman is concerned Sheridan's fine gentlemen always forget their manners—is revealed in all her poverty and ugliness beside the pretty young ladies; and Isaac's conceit and admiration of himself, "a sly little villain, a cunning dog," etc., are unmercifully laughed at; while the rest of the party make up matters with the easily mollified papa.

Such is the story. There is very little character attempted, save in Isaac, who is a sort of rudimentary sketch of a too cunning knave or artful simpleton caught in his own toils; and the dialogue, if sometimes clever enough, never for a moment reaches the sparkle of the *Rivals*. "The wit of the dialogue," Moore says—using that clever mist of words with which an experienced writer hides the fact that he can find nothing to say on a certain subject—"except in one or two instances, is of that amusing kind which lies near the surface—which is produced without effort, and may be enjoyed without wonder." If this means that there is nothing at all wonderful about it, it is no doubt true enough; though there are one or two phrases which are worth preserving, such as that in which the Jew is described as being "like the blank leaves between the Old

and New Testament," since he is a convert of recent date and no very certain faith.

It was, however, the music which made the piece popular, and the songs which Sheridan wrote for Linley's setting were many of them pretty, and all neat and clever. Everybody knows "Had I a heart for falsehood framed," which is sung by the walking gentleman of the piece, a certain Don Carlos, who has nothing to do but to take care of Louisa during her wanderings, and to sing some of the prettiest songs. Perhaps, on the whole, this is the best :

"Had I a heart for falsehood framed,  
 I ne'er could injure you ;  
 For though your tongue no promise claim'd,  
 Your charms would make me true.  
 To you no soul shall bear deceit,  
 No stranger offer wrong ;  
 But friends in all the aged you'll meet,  
 And lovers in the young.

"But when they learn that you have blest  
 Another with your heart,  
 They'll bid aspiring passion cease  
 And act a brother's part.  
 Then, lady, dread not here deceit,  
 Nor fear to suffer wrong ;  
 For friends in all the aged you'll meet,  
 And lovers in the young."

The part of Carlos is put in, with Sheridan's usual indifference to construction, for the sake of the music, and in order to employ a certain tenor who was a favourite with the public, there being no possible occasion for him, so far as the dramatic action is concerned.

This is what Byron, nearly half a century after, called "the best opera" in English, and which was lauded to the

skies in its day. The *Beggar's Opera*, with which it is constantly compared, has, however, much outlived it in the general knowledge, if the galvanic and forced resurrection given by an occasional performance can be called life. The songs are sung no longer, and many who quote lines like the well-known "Sure such a pair were never seen" are in most cases totally unaware where they come from. Posterity, which has so thoroughly carried out the judgment of contemporaries in respect to the *Rivals*, has not extended its favour to the *Duenna*. Perhaps the attempt to conjoin spoken dialogue to any great extent with music is never a very successful attempt: for English opera does not seem to last. Its success is momentary. Musical enthusiasts care little for the "words," and not even so much for melody as might be desired; and the genuine playgoer is impatient of those interruptions to the action of a piece which has any pretence at dramatic interest, while neither of the conjoint arts do their best in such a formal copartnery. Sheridan, however, spared no pains to make the partnership successful. He was very anxious that the composer should be on the spot and secure that his compositions were done full justice to. "Harris is extravagantly sanguine of its success as to plot and dialogue," he writes; "they will exert themselves to the utmost in the scenery, etc.; but I never saw any one so disconcerted as he was at the idea of there being no one to put them in the right way as to music." "Dearest father," adds Mrs. Sheridan, "I shall have no spirits or hopes of the opera unless we see you." The young dramatist, however, had his ideas as to the music as well as the literary portion of the piece, and did not submit himself blindly to his father-in-law's experience. "The first," he says, "I should wish to be a pert, sprightly air, for though some of the words

mayn't seem suited to it, I should mention that they are neither of them in earnest in what they say: Leoni (Carlos) takes it up seriously, and I want him to show advantageously in the six lines beginning, 'Gentle Maid.' I should tell you that he sings nothing well but in a plaintive or pastoral style, and his voice is such as appears to me always to be hurt by much accompaniment. I have observed, too, that he never gets so much applause as when he makes a cadence. Therefore my idea is that he should make a flourish at 'Shall I grieve you.' These instructions show how warmly Sheridan at this period of life interested himself in every detail of his theatrical work. Linley, it is said, had the good sense to follow these directions implicitly.

The success of the *Duenna* at Covent Garden put Garrick and his company at the rival theatre on their mettle; and it was wittily said that "the old woman would be the death of the old man." Garrick chose the moment when her son was proving so dangerous a rival to him to resuscitate Mrs. Sheridan's play called the *Discovery*, in which he himself played the chief part—a proceeding which does not look very friendly; and as Thomas Sheridan had been put forth by his enemies as the great actor's rival, it might well be that there was no very kind feeling between them. But the next chapter in young Sheridan's life shows Garrick in so benevolent a light that it is evident his animosity to the father, if it existed, had no influence on his conduct to the son. Garrick was now very near the close of his career; and when it was understood that he meant, not only to retire from the stage, but to resign his connection with the theatre altogether, a great commotion arose in the theatrical world. These were the days of patents, when the two great theatres held a sort of monopoly, and

were safe from all rivalry except that of each other. It was at the end of the year 1775 that Garrick's intention of "selling his moiety of the patent of Drury Lane Theatre" became known; and Richard Sheridan was then in the early flush of his success, crowding the rival theatre, and promising a great succession of brilliant work to come. But it could scarcely be supposed that a young man just emerging out of obscurity—rich, indeed, in his first gains, and no doubt seeing before him a great future, but yet absolutely destitute of capital—could have been audacious enough, without some special encouragement, to think of acquiring this great but precarious property, and launching himself upon such a venture. How he came to think of it we are left uninformed, but the first whisper of the chance seems to have inflamed his mind; and Garrick, whether or not he actually helped him with money, as some say, was at all events favourable to him from the beginning of the negotiations. He had promised that the refusal should first be offered to Colman; but when Colman, as he expected, declined, it was the penniless young dramatist whom of all competitors the old actor preferred. Sheridan had a certain amount of backing, though not enough, as far as would appear, to lessen the extraordinary daring of the venture—his father-in-law, Linley, who it is to be supposed had in his long career laid up some money, taking part in the speculation along with a certain Dr. Ford; but both in subordination to the young man who had no money at all. Here are Sheridan's explanations of the matter addressed to his father-in-law:

"According to his (Garrick's) demand, the whole is valued at £70,000. He appears very shy of letting his books be looked into as the test of the profits on this sum, but says it must be in its nature a purchase on speculation. However, he had promised me a

rough estimate of his own of the entire receipts for the last seven years. But after all it must certainly be a purchase on speculation without money's worth having been made out. One point he solemnly avers, which is that he will never part with it under the price above-mentioned. This is all I can say on the subject until Wednesday, though I can't help adding that I think we might safely give £5000 more on this purchase than richer people. The whole valued at £70,000, the annual interest is £3500; while this is cleared the proprietors are safe. But I think it must be infernal management indeed that does not double it."

A few days later the matter assumes a definite shape :

"Garrick was extremely explicit, and in short we came to a final resolution ; so that if the necessary matters are made out to all our satisfactions, we may sign and seal a previous engagement within a fortnight.

"I meet him again to-morrow evening, when we are to name a day for a conveyancer on our side to meet his solicitor, Wallace. I have pitched on a Mr. Phipps, at the recommendation and by the advice of Dr. Ford. The three first steps to be taken are these—our lawyer is to look into the titles, tenures, etc., of the house and adjoining estate, the extent and limitations of the patent, etc.; we shall then employ a builder (I think Mr. Collins) to survey the state and repair in which the whole premises are, to which Mr. G. entirely consents ; Mr. G. will then give us a fair and attested estimate from his books of what the profits have been, at an average, for these last seven years. This he has shown me in rough, and, valuing the property at £70,000, the interest has exceeded ten per cent.

"We should after this certainly make an interest to get the King's promise that while the theatre is well conducted, etc., he will grant no patent for a third, though G. seems confident he never will. If there is any truth in professions and appearances, G. seems likely always to continue our friend and to give every assistance in his power.

"The method of our sharing the purchase, I should think, may be thus—Ewart to take £10,000, you £10,000, and I £10,000. Dr. Ford agrees with the greatest pleasure to embark the other £5000; and, if you do not choose to venture so much, will, I daresay, share it with you. Ewart is preparing his money, and I have a certainty of



my part. We shall have a very useful ally in Dr. Ford, and my father offers his services on our own terms. We cannot unite Garrick to our interests too firmly; and I am convinced his influence will bring Leasy to our terms, if he should be ill-advised enough to desire to interfere in what he is totally unqualified for."

Ewart was the ever-faithful friend to whose house in London Sheridan had taken Miss Linley, whose son had been his second in the affair with Captain Matthews—a man upon whose support the Sheridan family could always rely. But the source from which young Richard himself got the money for his own share remains a mystery, of which no one has yet found the solution. "Not even to Mr. Linley," says Moore, "while entering into all other details, does he hint at the fountain-head from which the supply is to come," and he adds a few somewhat commonplace reflections as to the manner in which all Sheridan's successes had as yet been obtained:

"There was, indeed, something mysterious and miraculous about all his acquisitions, whether in love, in learning, in wit, or in wealth. How or when his stock of knowledge was laid in nobody knew: it was as much a matter of marvel to those who never saw him read as the mode of existence of the chameleon has been to those who fancied it never eat. His advances in the heart of his mistress were, as we have seen, equally trackless and inaudible, and his triumph was the first that even his rivals knew of his love. In like manner the productions of his wit took the world by surprise, being perfected in secret till ready for display, and then seeming to break from under the cloud of his indolence in full maturity of splendour. His financial resources had no less an air of magic about them; and the mode by which he conjured up at this time the money for his first purchase into the theatre remains, as far as I can learn, still a mystery."

These remarks are somewhat foolish, to say the least, since the mystery attending the sudden successes of a

young man of genius are sufficiently explained as soon as his possession of that incommunicable quality has once been established; and the triumph of a brilliant youth, whose fascinating talk and social attractions were one of the features of his age, over his commonplace rivals in the heart of a susceptible girl does not even require genius to explain it. But neither genius itself nor all the personal fascination in the world can, alas! produce, when it is wanted, ten thousand pounds. The anonymous author of *Sheridan and his Times* asserts confidently that Garrick himself advanced the money, having conceived a great friendship for Sheridan, and formed a strong opinion as to his capacity to increase the reputation and success of the theatre. Of this statement, however, no proof is offered, and Moore evidently gives no credence to such a suggestion, though he notices that it had been made. The money was procured by some friendly help, no doubt. There were, as has been said, only the two great theatres in these days, none of the later crop having as yet sprung up, and each being under the protection of a patent; the speculation, therefore, was not so hazardous as it has proved to be since. It is, however, besides the mystery about the money, a most curious transformation to see the young idler, lover, and man of pleasure suddenly placed at the head of such an undertaking, with so much responsibility upon his shoulders, and—accustomed only to the shiftless and hand-to-mouth living of extravagant poverty—become at once the administrator of a considerable revenue and the head of a little community dependent upon him. He had done nothing all his life except, in a fit of inspiration of very recent date, produce a couple of plays. But it does not seem that any doubt of his powers crossed his mind or that of any of his associates. “Do not flag when

we come to the point," he says to his father-in-law; "I'll answer for it we shall see many golden campaigns."

The stir and quickening of new energy is apparent in all he writes. The circumstances were such as might well quicken the steadiest pulse, for not only was he likely to lay a foundation of fortune for himself (and his first child had lately been born—"a very magnificent fellow"), but his nearest connexions on both sides were involved, and likely to owe additional comfort and importance to the young prodigal whose own father had disowned him, and his wife's received him with the greatest reluctance—a reflection which could not but be sweet. With such hopes in his mind, the sobriety and composure with which he writes are astonishing:

"Leasy is utterly unequal to any department in the theatre. He has an opinion of me, and is very willing to let the whole burden and ostensibility be taken off his shoulders. But I certainly should not give up my time and labour (for his superior advantage, having so much greater a share) without some conclusive advantage. Yet I should by no means make the demand till I had shown myself equal to the task. My father purposes to be with us but one year: and that only to give us what advantage he can from his experience. He certainly must be paid for his trouble, and so certainly must you. You have experience and character equal to the line you would undertake, and it never can enter into anybody's head that you were to give your time, or any part of your attention, gratis because you had a share in the theatre. I have spoken on the subject both to Garrick and Leasy, and you will find no demur on any side to your gaining a *certain* income from the theatre, greater, I think, than you could make out of it, and in this the theatre would be acting only for its own advantage."

The other shareholder, who held the half of the property—while Sheridan, Linley, and Ford divided the other half between them—was a Mr. Lacy; and there seems a

charming possibility of some reminiscence of the brogue, though Sheridan probably had never been touched by it in his own person, having left Ireland as a child—in the misspelling of the name. It is impossible not to sympathise with him in the delightful consciousness of having proved the futility of all objections, and become the aid and hope, instead of the detriment and burden, of both families, which must have sweetened his own brilliant prospects. His father evidently was now fully reconciled and sympathetic, proud of his son, and disposed (though not without a consideration) to give him the benefit of his experience and advice; and Linley was to have the chance of an income from the theatre “greater than he could make out of it.” With what sweet moisture the eyes of the silenced Diva at home, the St. Cecilia whose mouth her young husband’s adoring pride had stopped, must have glistened to think that her father, who had done all he could to keep her Sheridan at arm’s length, was now to have his fortune made by that injured and unappreciated hero! She had other causes for happiness and glory. “Your grandson,” Sheridan adds, in the same letter to Linley, “astonishes everybody by his vivacity, his talents for music and poetry, and the most perfect integrity of mind.” Everything was now brilliant and hopeful about the young pair. The only drawback was the uneasiness of Sheridan’s position, until the business should be finally settled, between the two theatres. “My confidential connexion with the other house,” he says, “is peculiarly distressing till I can with prudence reveal my situation, and such a treaty, however prudently managed, cannot long be kept secret.”

The matter was settled early in the year 1776, Sheridan being then twenty-five. Before the end of the year

troubles arose with Lacy, and it would seem that Sheridan took the strong step of retiring from the managership and carrying the actors along with him, leaving the other perplexed and feeble proprietor to do the best he could with such materials as he could pick up. All quarrels, however, were soon made up, and affairs proceeded amicably for some time; but Sheridan eventually bought Lacy out at a further expenditure of £45,000, partly obtained, it would appear, from Garrick, partly by other means. The narrative is not very clear, nor is it very important to know what squabbles might convulse the theatre, or how the friends of Lacy might characterise the "conceited young man," who showed no inclination to consult a colleague of so different a calibre from himself. But it seems to be agreed on all sides that the beginning of Sheridan's reign at Drury was not very prosperous. Though he had shown so much energy in his financial arrangements at the beginning, it was not easy to get over the habits of all his previous life, and work with the steadiness and regularity of a man of business, as was needful. There was an interval of dulness which did not carry out the hopes very naturally formed when the young dramatist who had twice filled the rival theatre with eager crowds and applause came to the head of affairs. Garrick, who had so long been its chief attraction, was gone; and it was a new group of actors, unfamiliar to him, with whom the new manager had to do. He remodelled for them a play of Vanbrugh's, which he called a *Trip to Scarborough*, but which, notwithstanding all he did to it, remained still the production of an earlier age, wanting in the refinement and comparative purity which Sheridan himself had already done so much to make popular. The Miss Hoyden, the rustic lady whom Lord Foppington is destined to

marry, but does not, is a creature of the species of Tony Lumpkin, though infinitely less clever and shrewd than that delightful lout, and has no sort of kindred with the pretty gentlewoman of Sheridan's natural period. And the public were not specially attracted by this *réchauffé*. In fact, after all the excitement and wonderful novelty of this astonishing launch into life, the reaction was great and discouraging. Old stock pieces of a repertory of which Garrick had been the soul—new contrivances of pantomime “expected to draw all the human race to Drury,” and which were rendered absolutely necessary, “on account of a marvellous preparation of the kind which is making at Covent Garden”—must have fallen rather flat both upon the mind of the manager, still new and inexperienced in his office, and of the public, which no doubt at the hands of the author of the *Rivals*, and with the songs of the *Duenna* still tingling in its ears, expected great things. But this pause was only the *reculer pour mieux sauter* which precedes a great effort; for early in the next year Sheridan rose to the full height of his genius, and the *School for Scandal* blazed forth, a great Jupiter among the minor starlights of the drama, throwing the rival house and all its preparations altogether into the shade.

## CHAPTER III.

### THE "SCHOOL FOR SCANDAL."

It was clear that a great effort was required for the advantage of Drury Lane, to make up for the blow of Garrick's withdrawal, and to justify the hopes founded upon the new management; and Mr. Lacy and the public had both reason to wonder that the head which had filled Covent Garden from pit to gallery should do nothing for the house in which all his hopes of fortune were involved. No doubt the cares of management and administration were heavy, and the previous training of Sheridan had not been such as to qualify him for continuous labour of any kind; but at the same time it was not unnatural that his partners in the undertaking should have grumbled at the long interval which elapsed before he entered the lists in his own person. It was May, 1777, more than a year after his entry upon the proprietorship of Drury Lane, when the *School for Scandal* was produced, and then it was hurried into the hands of the performers piecemeal before it was finished, the last act finding its way to the theatre five days before the final production. The manuscript, Moore informs us, was issued forth in shreds and patches, there being but "one rough draft of the last five scenes, scribbled upon detached pieces of paper; while of all the preceding acts there are numerous transcripts, scat-

tered promiscuously through six or seven books, with new interlineations and memoranda to each. On the last leaf of all, which exists, just as we may suppose it to have been despatched by him to the copyist," Moore adds, "there is the following curious specimen of a doxology, written hastily, in the handwriting of the respective parties, at the bottom :

'Finished at last ; thank God !

' R. B. SHERIDAN.

'Amen !

' W. HAWKINS.' "

The bearer of the latter name was the prompter, and there is a whole history of hurry and anxiety and confusion, a company disorganised, and an unhappy functionary at the end of his powers, in this devout exclamation. It is bad enough to keep the press waiting, but a dozen or so of actors arrested in their study, and the whole business of the theatre depending upon the time at which a man of fashion got home from an entertainment, or saw his guests depart in the grey of the morning, is chaos indeed. "We have heard him say," writes a gossiping commentator, "that he had in those early days stolen from his bed at sunrise to prosecute his literary labours, or after midnight, when his visitors had departed, flown to his desk, and, at the cost of a bottle of port, sat down to resume the work which the previous morning in its early rising had dawned upon." The highly polished diction of the *School for Scandal*, and the high-pressure of its keen and trenchant wit, does not look much like the excited work of the small hours inspired by port ; but a man who is fully launched in the tide of society, and sought on all hands to give brilliancy to the parties of his patrons, must needs "steal a few hours from the night."



"It was the fate of Sheridan through life," Moore says, "and in a great degree his policy, to gain credit for excessive indolence and carelessness." It seems very likely that he has here hit the mark, and furnished an explanation for many of the apparently headlong feats of composition by which many authors are believed to have distinguished themselves. There is no policy which tells better. It is not merely an excuse for minor faults, but an extraordinary enhancement, in the eyes of the uninstructed, of merit of all kinds. To be able to dash off in a moment, at a sitting, what would take the laborious plodder a week's work, is a kind of triumph which is delightful both to the performer and spectator; and many besides Sheridan have found it a matter of policy to keep up such a character. The anonymous biographer whom we have already quoted is very angry with Moore for attempting to show that Sheridan did not dash off his best work in this reckless way, but studied every combination, and sharpened his sword by repeated trials of its edge and temper. The scientific critic has always scorned what the multitude admire, and the fashion of our own age has so far changed, that to show an elaborate process of workmanship for any piece of literary production, and if possible to trace its lineage to previous works and well-defined impulses and influences, is now the favourite object of the biographer and commentator. We confess a leaning to the primitive method, and a preference for the Minerva springing full-armed from the brain of Jove to the goddesses more gradually developed of scientific investigation.

But Moore's account of the growth of Sheridan's powers, and of the steps by which he ascended to the mastery of his art, are interesting and instructive. The *Rivals*

sprang into being without much thought, with that instinctive and unerring perception of the right points to recollect and record, which makes observation the unconscious instrument of genius, and is so immensely and indescribably different from mere imitation. But the *School for Scandal*—a more elaborate performance in every way—required a different handling. It seems to have floated in the writer's mind from the moment when he discovered his own powers, stimulating his invention and his memory at once, and prompting half a dozen beginnings before the right path was discovered. Now it is one story, now another, that attracts his fancy. He will enlist those gossiping circles which he feels by instinct to be so serviceable for the stage, to serve the purpose of a scheming woman and separate a pair of lovers. Anon, departing from that idea, he will employ them to bring about the catastrophe of a loveless marriage, in which an old husband and a young wife, the very commonplaces of comedy, shall take a new and original development. Two distinct stories rise in his mind, like two butterflies circling about each other, keeping him for a long time undecided which is the best for his purpose. The first plot is one which the spectator has now a little difficulty in tracing through the brilliant scenes which were originally intended to carry it out, though it is distinctly stated in the first scene, between Lady Sneerwell and Snake, which still opens the comedy. As it now stands this intimation of her ladyship's purpose is far too important for anything that follows, and is apt to mystify the spectator, who finds little in the after scenes to justify it—a confusion at once explained when we are made aware that this was the original *motif* of the entire piece, the object of which was to separate, not Charles Surface, but a sentimental hero called Clarimont, Florival, and

other pastoral names, from the Maria whom he loves, and who is the ward, niece, or even step-daughter of Lady Sneerwell, a beautiful widow and leader of scandal, who loves him. But while the author is playing with this plot, and designing fragmentary scenes in which to carry it out, the other is tugging at his fancy—an entirely distinct idea, with a group of new and individual characters: the old man and his wife, the two contrasted brothers, one of whom is to have the reputation of being her lover, while the other is the real villain. At first there is no connection whatever between the two. The *School for Scandal* proper is first tried. Here would seem to be the first suggestions of it, no doubt noted down at a venture for future use without any very definite intention, perhaps after a morning's stroll through the crowd which surrounded the waters of the Bath with so many bitternesses. There are here, the reader will perceive, no indications of character, or even names, to serve as symbols for the Crabtrees and Candours to come:

“THE SLANDERER. *A Pump-room Scene.*

“Friendly caution to the newspapers.

“It is whispered—

“She is a constant attendant at church, and very frequently takes Dr. M'Brawn home with her.

“Mr. Worthy is very good to the girl: for my part, I dare swear he has no ill intention.

“What! Major Wesley's Miss Montague?

“Lud, ma'am! the match is certainly broke. No creature knows the cause: some say a flaw in the lady's character, and others in the gentleman's fortune.

“To be sure, they do say—

“I hate to repeat what I hear—

“She was inclined to be a little too plump before they went—

“The most intrepid blush. I've known her complexion stand fire for an hour together.”

Whether these jottings suggested the design, or were merely seized upon by that faculty of appropriating "son bien ou il le trouve," which is one of the privileges of genius, it is impossible to tell; but it will be seen that the germ of all the highly-wrought and polished scenes of the scandalous college is in them. The first use to which they were put is soon visible in the scene between Lady Sneerwell and Snake (called Spatter in the original) which opened the uncompleted play, and still stands, though with much less significance, at the beginning of the actual one. In this sketch Crabtree and Sir Benjamin Backbite appear as parties to the intrigue, the latter being the lover of Maria, and intended to embroil her with Clarimont, who is no gallant rake, like his prototype in the existing drama, but a piece of perfection, highly superior to the gossip—"one of your moral fellows . . . who has too much good-nature to say a witty thing himself, and is too ill-natured to permit it in others," and who is as dull as virtue of this abstract type is usually represented on the stage. To show the difference in the workmanship, we may quote the only portion of the old sketch which is identical in meaning with the perfected one. Lady Sneerwell and Spatter are, as in the first version, "discovered" when the curtain rises:

*Lady S.* The paragraphs, you say, were all inserted?

*Spat.* They were, madam.

*Lady S.* Did you circulate the report of Lady Brittle's intrigue with Captain Boastall?

*Spat.* Madam, by this time Lady Brittle is the talk of half the town: and in a week will be treated as a demirep.

*Lady S.* What have you done as to the innuendo of Miss Nicely's fondness for her own footman?

*Spat.* 'Tis in a fair train, ma'am. I told it to my hair-dresser; he courts a milliner's girl in Pall Mall, whose mistress has a first cousin who is waiting-woman to Lady Clackitt. I think in about

fourteen hours it must reach Lady Clackitt, and then, you know, the business is done.

"*Lady S.* But is that sufficient, do you think ?

"*Spat.* Oh Lud, ma'am ! I'll undertake to ruin the character of the primmest prude in London with half as much. Ha, ha ! Did your ladyship never hear how poor Miss Shepherd lost her lover and her character last summer at Scarborough ? This was the whole of it. One evening at Lady ——'s the conversation happened to turn on the difficulty of feeding Nova Scotia sheep in England—"

The reader will recollect the story about the sheep, which is produced at a later period in the scene, under a different name in the actual version, as are Miss Nicely and her footman. To show, however, the improvement of the artist's taste, we will place beside the less perfect essay we have just quoted the scene as it stands :

"*Lady Sneer.* The paragraphs, you say, Mr. Snake, were all inserted ?

"*Snake.* They were, madam ; and as I copied them myself, in a feigned hand, there can be no suspicion whence they came.

"*Lady Sneer.* Did you circulate the report of Lady Brittle's intrigue with Captain Boastall ?

"*Snake.* That's in as fine a train as your ladyship could wish. In the common course of things I think it must reach Mrs. Clackitt's ears within four-and-twenty hours, and then, you know, the business is as good as done.

"*Lady Sneer.* Why, truly Mrs. Clackitt has a very pretty talent, and a great deal of industry.

"*Snake.* True, madam, and has been tolerably successful in her day. To my knowledge she has been the cause of six matches being broken off, and three sons disinherited. . . . Nay, I have more than once traced her causing a *tête-a-tête* in *The Town and Country Magazine*, when the parties perhaps had never seen each other before in the course of their lives.

"*Lady Sneer.* She certainly has talents, but her manner is gross.

"*Snake.* 'Tis very true. She generally designs well, has a free tongue, and a bold invention ; but her colouring is too dark, and her

outlines often extravagant. She wants that delicacy of tint and mellowness of sneer which distinguish your ladyship's scandal.

"*Lady Sneer.* You are partial, Snake.

"*Snake.* Not in the least; everybody allows that Lady Sneerwell can do more with a word and a look than many can with the most laboured detail, even when they happen to have a little truth on their side to support it."

It seems needless to reproduce the dull and artificial scenes which Moore quotes by way of showing how Sheridan floundered through the mud of commonplace before he found firm footing on the ground where he achieved so brilliant a success. They are like an artist's first experiments in design, and instructive only in that sense. Perhaps it was in the despair which is apt to seize the imagination when a young writer finds his performance so inadequate to express his idea that Sheridan threw the whole machinery of the scandalous circle aside and betook himself to the construction of the other drama which had got into his brain—the story of old Teazle and his young wife, and of the brothers Plausible or Pliant, or half a dozen names besides, as the fancy of their author varies. In the first sketch our friend Sir Peter, that caustic and polished gentleman, is Solomon Teazle, a retired tradesman, who maunders over his first wife, and his own folly, after getting rid of her, in encumbering himself with another; but after a very brief interval this beginning, altogether unsuitable to the writer's tastes and capabilities, changes insensibly into the more harmonious conception of the old husband as we know him. The shopkeeper was not in Sheridan's way. Such a *hobereau* as Bob Acres, with his apings of fashion, might come within his limited range, but it did not extend to those classes which lie outside of society. Trip and Fag and their fellows were strictly

within this circle; they are as witty as their masters in the hands of the dramatist, and rather more fine, as is the nature of a gentleman's gentleman; and even royalty itself must be content to share the stage with these indispensable ministers and copyists. But the world beyond was at all times a sealed book to this historian of fashionable folly—and he was wisely inspired in throwing over the plebeian. He seems very speedily to have found out his mistake, for nothing more is heard of Solomon; and in the next fragmentary scene the dramatist glides at once into a discussion of Lady Teazle's extravagances, in which we have a great deal of unmeaning detail, all cleared away like magic in the existing scene, which is framed upon it, yet is as much superior to it as a lively and amusing altercation can be to the items of a lengthy account interspersed with mutual recriminations. It would appear, however, that the Teazle play was subsequent to the Sneerwell one, for there is a great deal of pointed and brilliant writing, and much that is retained almost without change, in the first adumbrations of the great scenes with Joseph Surface. "So, then," says Lady Teazle, in this early sketch, "you would have me sin in my own defence, and part with my virtue to preserve my reputation," an epigrammatic phrase which is retained without alteration in the final scene. Moore tells us that this sentence is "written in every direction, and without any material change in its form, over the pages of his different memorandum-books." It is evident that it had caught Sheridan's fancy, and that he had favourite phrases, as some people have favourite children, produced on every possible occasion, and always delighted in.

How it was that Sheridan was led to amalgamate these two plays into one we are left altogether without informa-

tion. Moore's knowledge seems to have been drawn entirely from the papers put into his hands, which probably no one then living knew much about, belonging as they did to the early career of a man who had lived to be old, and abandoned altogether the walk of literature, in which he had won his early laurels. He surmises that the two-act comedy which Sheridan tells Linley is about to be put in rehearsal may have been the Teazle play; but this is mere conjecture, and we can only suppose that Sheridan had found, as he grew better acquainted with the requirements of the stage, that neither of the plots he had sketched out was enough to keep the interest of the audience; and that, in the necessity that pressed upon him for something to fill the stage and stop the mouths of his new company and associates, he threw the two plots together by a sudden inspiration, knitting the one to the other by the dazzling links of those scandalous scenes which, to tell the truth, have very little to do with either. Whether he transferred these bodily from an already polished and completed sketch, working them into the materials needed for his double intrigue with as little alteration of the original fabric as possible, or if in his haste and confidence of success he deliberately refrained from connecting them with the action of the piece, we have no way of telling. The daring indifference which he shows to that supposed infallible rule of dramatic composition which ordains that every word of the dialogue should help on the action, is edifying, and shows how entirely independent of rule is success. At the same time it strikes us as curious that Sheridan did not find it expedient to employ the evil tongues a little more upon the group of people whose fortunes are the immediate subject of the comedy. For instance, there is no warrant whatever in the play for



the suspicion of Charles Surface which Sir Peter expresses at an exciting moment. A hint of his character and impending troubles is indeed given us, but nothing that can in the least link his name with that of Lady Teazle—which seems a distinct inadvertence on the part of the dramatist, since there might have been an admirable opportunity for piquing our curiosity by a *séance* of the scandalmongers upon the possible relations between those two gay prodigals.

The scandalous scenes, however (save the last of them), are almost entirely without connexion with the plot. They can be detached and enjoyed separately without any sensible loss in the reader's (or even spectator's) mind. In themselves the management of all the details is inimitable. The eager interchange takes away our breath; there is no break or possibility of pause in it. The malign suggestion, the candid astonishment, the spite which assails, and the malicious good-nature which excuses, are all balanced to perfection, with a spirit which never flags for a moment. And when the veterans in the art are joined by a brilliant and mischievous recruit in the shape of Lady Teazle, rushing in amongst them in pure *gaieté du cœur*, the energy of her young onslaught outdoes them all. The talk has never been so brilliant, never so pitiless, as when she joins them. She adds the gift of mimicry to all their malice, and produces a genuine laugh even from those murderers of their neighbours' reputations. This is one of the side-lights, perhaps unintentional, which keen insight throws upon human nature, showing how mere headlong imitation and high spirits, and the determination to do whatever other people do, and a little more, go further than the most mischievous intention. Perhaps the author falls into his usual fault of giving too much wit and point to the utter-

ances of the young wife, who is not intended to be clever; but her sudden dash into the midst of the dowagers, and unexpected victory over them in their own line, is full of nature. "Very well, Lady Teazle, I see you can be a little severe," says Lady Sneerwell, expressing the astonishment of the party; while Mrs. Candour hastens to welcome Sir Peter on his arrival with her habitual complaint that "they have been so censorious—and Lady Teazle as bad as any one." The slanderers themselves are taken by surprise, and the indignation and horror of the husband know no bounds. There is no more successful touch in the whole composition.

Apart from these scenes, the construction of the play shows once more Sheridan's astonishing instinct for a striking situation. Two such will immediately occur to the mind of the reader—the great screen scene, and that in which Sir Charles Surface sells his family portraits. The first is incomparably the greater of the two, and one which has rarely been equalled on the stage. The succession of interviews, one after another, has not a word too much; nor could the most impatient audience find any sameness or repetition in the successive arrivals, each one of which adds an embarrassment to the dilemma of Joseph Surface, and helps to clear up those of his victims. As the imbroglio grows before our eyes, and every door of escape for the hypocrite is shut up, without even the common sentimental error of awakening commiseration for him, the most matter-of-fact spectator can scarcely repress, even when carried along by the interest of the story, a sensation of admiring wonder at the skill with which all these combinations are effected. It is less tragic than *Tartuffe*, insomuch as Orgon's profound belief, and the darker guilt of the domestic traitor, move us more deeply; and it

is not terrible, like the unveiling of Iago ; but neither is it trivial, as the ordinary discoveries of deceitful wives and friends to which we are accustomed on the stage so generally are ; and the fine art with which Sir Peter—something of an old curmudgeon in the earlier scenes—is made unexpectedly to reveal his better nature, and thus prepare the way, unawares, for the re-establishment of his own happiness at the moment when it seems entirely shattered, is worthy of the highest praise. It would, no doubt, have been higher art could the dramatist have deceived his audience as well as the personages of the play, and made us also parties in the surprise of the discovery. But this is what no one has as yet attempted, not even Shakspeare, and we have no right to object to Sheridan that we are in the secret of Joseph's baseness all the time, just as we are in the secret of Tartuffe's, and can with difficulty understand how it is that he deceives any one. There remains for the comedy of the future (or the tragedy, which, wherever the deeper chords of life are touched, comes to very much the same thing) a still greater achievement—that of inventing an Iago who shall deceive the audience as well as the Othello upon whom he plays, and be found out only by us and our hero at the same moment. Probably, could such a thing be done, the effect would be too great, and the indignation and horror of the crowd, thus skilfully excited, produce a sensation beyond that which is permissible to fiction. But Sheridan does not deal with any tragical powers. Nothing deeper is within his reach than the momentary touch of real feeling with which Lady Teazle vindicates herself, and proves her capacity for better things. The gradual development of the situation, the unwilling agency of the deceiver in opening the eyes and touching the heart of the woman he hopes to seduce, and

clearing the character of the brother whom he desires to incriminate; the confusion of his mind as one after another so many dangerous elements come together; the chuckling malice of the old man, eager, half to exonerate Joseph from the charge of austerity, half to betray his secret, little suspecting how nearly his own credit is involved; the stupefying dismay of the disclosure—are managed with the most complete success. The scene is in itself a succinct drama, quite comprehensible even when detached from its context, and of the highest effectiveness. So far as morals are concerned, it is as harmless as any equivocal situation can be. To be sure, the suggestion of the little milliner is no more savoury than the presence of Lady Teazle is becoming to her reputation and duty; but the utter confusion of the scheme, and the admirable and unexpected turn given to the conclusion by her genuine perception of her folly and her husband's merit, go as far as is possible to neutralise all that is amiss in it. There had been a temporary doubt as to whether the *Rivals* would catch the public fancy: there was none at all about this.

The other great scene, that in which Charles Surface sells his pictures, has qualities of a different kind. It is less perfect and more suggestive than most of Sheridan's work. We have to accept the favourite type of the stage hero—the reckless, thoughtless, warm-hearted, impressionable spendthrift, as willing to give as he is averse to pay, scattering his wild oats by handfuls, wasting his life and his means in riotous living, yet easily touched and full of kind impulses—before we can do justice to it. This character, whatever moralists may say, always has, and probably always will retain a favoured place in fiction. Though we know very well that in real life dissipation does not keep

the heart soft or promote gratitude and other generous sentiments, yet we are still willing to believe that the riotous youth whose animal spirits carry him away into devious paths is at bottom better than the demure one who keeps his peccadilloes out of sight of the world. The eighteenth century had no doubt on the subject. Charles Surface is the light-hearted prodigal whose easy vices have brought him to the point of destruction. Whatever grave thoughts on the subject he may have within, he is resolute in carrying out his gay career to the end, and ready to laugh in the face of ruin. A more severe taste might consider his light-heartedness swagger and his generosity prodigality; but we are expected on the stage to consider such characteristics as far more frequently conjoined with a good heart than sobriety and decency. The reckless young reprobate, at the lowest ebb of his fortune, ready to throw away anything or everything, and exposing himself hopelessly and all his follies to the rich uncle who has come to test him, conciliates our good opinion from the beginning by the real kindness with which he protects "little Premium," the supposed money-lender, from the rude pleasantries of his boon companions. The touch of desperation which is in his gaiety without ever finding expression in words enhances the effect of his headlong talk and wild wit. When his companion, Careless, to whom it is all a good joke, complains, "Charles, I haven't a hammer; and what's an auctioneer without a hammer?" the master of the ruined house clutches, with a laugh, at the family pedigree, firmly and tightly encircling its roller, and throws that to him: "Here, Careless, you shall have no common bit of mahogany; here's the family tree for you, and you may knock down my ancestors with their own pedigree," he cries. Such a laugh raises echoes which we wonder

whether Sheridan contemplated or had any thought of. As the prodigal rattles on, with almost too much swing and "way" upon him in the tragi-comedy of fate, we are hurried along in the stream of his wild gaiety with sympathy which he has no right to. The audience is all on his side from the first word. Sir Oliver is a weak-headed old gentleman, not at all equal to Sir Peter, and is overcome with ludicrous ease and rapidity; but the obstinacy of affectionate gratitude with which the hot-headed young fellow holds by the portrait of his benefactor, and the fine superiority with which he puts all "little Premium's" overtures aside, without putting on any new-born virtue or pretensions to amendment, are in their way a masterpiece. He pretends no admiration for the distant uncle, but speaks of him as freely as of the other sacrificed ancestors. "The little ill-looking fellow over the settee" evokes no sentiment from him. He is quite willing to draw a post-obit upon Sir Oliver's life, and to jest at him as a little nabob with next to no liver. But for all that, a sort of impudent fidelity, a reckless gratitude, is in the ruined prodigal. The equally reckless but more composed friend, who is ready to abet him in all his folly with the indifference of an unconcerned bystander, the wondering contempt of the Jew, the concealed and somewhat maudlin emotion of the once indignant uncle, surround the figure of the swaggering gallant with the most felicitous background. It is far less elaborate and complicated than the companion scene, but it is scarcely less successful.

It is a curious particular in the excellence of the piece, however, and scarcely a commendation, we fear, in the point of view of art, that these very striking scenes, as well as those in which the scandalmongers hold their amusing conclave, may all be detached from the setting with the

greatest ease and without any perceptible loss of interest. Never was there a drama which it was so easy to take to pieces. The screen scene in itself forms, as we have already pointed out, a succinct and brilliant little performance which the simple audience could understand; and though the others might require a word or two of preface, they are each sufficiently perfect in themselves to admit of separation from the context. It says a great deal for the power of the writer that this should be consistent with the general interest of the comedy, and that we are scarcely conscious, in the acting, of the looseness with which it hangs together, or the independence of the different parts. Sheridan, who was not a playwright by science, but rather by accident, did not in all likelihood, in the exuberance of his strength, trouble himself with any study of the laws that regulate dramatic composition. The unities of time and place he preserves, indeed, because it suits him to do so; the incidents of his pieces might all happen in a few hours, for anything we know, and with singularly little change of scene; but the close composition and interweaving of one part with another, which all dramatists ought, but so very few do, study, evidently cost him little thought. He has the quickest eye for a situation, and knows that nothing pleases the playgoing public so much as a strong combination and climax; but he does not take the trouble to rivet the links of his chain or fit them very closely into each other. It is a wonderful tribute to his power that, notwithstanding this looseness of construction, few people object to allow to the *School for Scandal* the pre-eminence accorded to it by admiring contemporaries as being the best modern English comedy. There is more nature and more story in *She Stoops to Conquer*; but nothing so brilliant, so incisive, no such

concentration of all the forces of art, and nothing like the sparkle of the dialogue, the polish and ease of diction. Goldsmith's play, though produced only three or four years before, is a generation older in atmosphere and sentiment; but it is the only one which has proved a competitor with Sheridan's great comedy, or that we can compare with it. To go back to Shakspeare and place these brilliant studies of Society in the eighteenth century by the side of that radiant world of imagination which took refuge in the woods of Arden, or found a place in the enchanted island, would be futile indeed. It would be little less foolish than to compare Sheridan's prologues and occasional verses with the *Allegro* and the *Penseroso*. Not to that region or near it did he ever reach. It was not his to sound the depths of human thought or mount to any height of fancy. Rosalind and Prospero were out of his reckoning altogether; but for a lively observation of what was going on upon the surface of life, with an occasional step a little way—but only a little way—beyond, and a fine instinct for the concentration of incident and interest which make a striking dramatic scene, nobody has excelled him, and very few indeed reach anything like the level of his power.

This play, which the actors had begun to rehearse before it was all written, was received by everybody connected with the theatre with excitement and applause. Garrick himself, it is said, attended the rehearsals, and "was never known on any former occasion to be more anxious for a favourite piece." The old actor threw himself with generous warmth into the interest of the new dramatist, upon whom for the moment the glory of Drury Lane depended. Moore quotes a note from him which proves the active interest he took in the production of the



new play. "A gentleman who is as mad as himself about y<sup>e</sup> *School*," he writes, "remarked that the characters upon y<sup>e</sup> stage at y<sup>e</sup> falling of y<sup>e</sup> screen stand too long before they speak. I thought so too y<sup>e</sup> first night: he said it was y<sup>e</sup> same on y<sup>e</sup> 2nd, and was remark'd by others: tho' they should be astonish'd and a little petrify'd, yet it may be carry'd to too great a length." His affectionate interest is still further proved by the prologue, in which he speaks of Sheridan with a sort of paternal admiration:

"Is our young bard so young to think that he  
 Can stop the full spring-tide of calumny?  
 Knows he the world so little, and its trade?  
 Alas! the devil's sooner raised than laid.  
 So strong, so swift, the monster there's no gagging:  
 Cut Scandal's head off, still the tongue is wagging.  
 Proud of your smiles, once lavishly bestowed,  
 Again our young Don Quixote takes the road;  
 To show his gratitude he draws his pen,  
 And seeks the hydra, Scandal, in his den.  
 For your applause all perils he would through—  
 He'll fight—that's write—a caballero true,  
 Till every drop of blood—that's ink—is spilt for you."

It is a ludicrous circumstance in the history that an attempt was made after Sheridan's death, and by no less strange a hand than that of his first biographer, Watkins, to question the authorship of the *School for Scandal*, which, according to this absurd story, was the composition of an anonymous young lady, who sent it to the management of Drury Lane shortly before her death, an event of which Sheridan took advantage to produce her work as his own! That any reasonable creature could be found to give vent to such a ridiculous fiction is an evidence of human folly and malignity more remarkable

than any in the play, and laughably appropriate as connected with it—as if Sir Benjamin Backbite had risen from the grave to avenge himself.

It is needless to add that the popularity which has never failed for more than a century attended the first production of the great comedy. It brought back prosperity with a bound to the theatre, which had been struggling in vain under Sheridan's management against, so to speak, Sheridan himself at Covent Garden, in the shape of the *Rivals* and *Duenna*. Two years after its first production it is noted in the books of the theatre that "the *School for Scandal* damped the new pieces." Nothing could stand against it, and the account of the nightly receipts shows with what steadiness it continued to fill the treasury, which had been sinking to a lower and lower ebb.

Many attempts were made at the time, and have been made since, to show how and from whom Sheridan derived his ideas: a more justifiable appropriation than that of the play entire, though perhaps a still more disagreeable imputation, since many who would not give credit to the suggestion of a literary crime and wholesome robbery would not hesitate to believe the lesser accusation. Plagiarism is vile, and everywhere to be condemned; but it is an easy exercise of the critical faculty, and one in which, in all generations, some of the smaller professors of the craft find a congenial field of labour, to ferret out resemblances in imaginative compositions, which are as natural as the resemblances between members of the same race, were it not for the invidious suggestion that the one is a theft from the other. It would be nearly as reasonable to say that the family air and features of a noble house were stolen from the ancestors of the same. It is suggested accordingly that Joseph and Charles Surface

came from *Tom Jones* and *Bliffl*; that Mrs. Malaprop was perhaps Mrs. Slip-slop, or perhaps a sort of hash of Miss Tabitha Bramble and her waiting-maid; and even that the amusing meetings of the *School for Scandal* were a reflection from the *Misanthrope*. There will always be some who will take a pleasure in depreciating the originality of an author in this way; but it is scarcely necessary, now that Sheridan himself has become a classic, to take any trouble in pointing out the pettiness of such criticism, so far as he is concerned. Like Molière, he took his own where he found it, with an inalienable right to do so which no reasonable and competent literary tribunal would ever deny. The process by which one idea strikes fire upon another and helps to hand the light of imagination along the line, is a natural and noble one, honourable to every mind which has to do with it, and as unlike the baseness of literary robbery or imitation as any natural growth and evolution can be. It is, indeed, one of the finest offices of the poet to awaken smouldering thoughts in other intelligences, and strike off into the darkness as many varied scintillations of kindred light as the race can produce. A curious instance of the ease with which accusations of this sort are made, as well as of how a small slander will extend and spread, is to be found, of all places in the world, in the record made by Samuel Rogers of the conversations of Charles James Fox. Sheridan, among other appropriations, had been supposed to take the idea of Sir Oliver's return from his own mother's novel of *Sidney Biddulph*. He might for that matter have taken it from a hundred novels, since no incident was more hackneyed. "Thought *Sidney Biddulph* one of the best novels of the age," Rogers reports Fox to have said. "Sheridan denied having read it, though the plot of his *School for Scandal*

was borrowed from it." Sir Peter Teazle's ball, which, after missing Charles Surface, "struck against a little bronze Shakspeare that stood over the fireplace, glanced out of the window at a right angle, and wounded the postman who was just coming to the door with a double letter from Northamptonshire," was scarcely a more successful example of the amplification of report than this. It is not to be supposed that Fox meant any harm to his friend and sometime colleague; but the expansion of the original statement, that the idea of the Indian uncle's return came from this source, to the bold assertion that the plot of the *School for Scandal* was borrowed from it, is worthy of Lady Sneerwell herself.

The play was not published in any authorised edition during Sheridan's lifetime, probably because it was more to his profit, according to theatrical regulations, that it should not be so—though Sheridan's grand statement that he had been "nineteen years endeavouring to satisfy himself with the style of the *School for Scandal*, and had not succeeded," may be taken as the reason if the reader chooses. He was sufficiently dilatory and fastidious to have made that possible. It was, however, printed in Dublin (which was the great seat of literary piracy before the Union, when it shifted farther west), from a copy which Sheridan had sent to his sister, Mrs. Lefanu, "to be disposed of for her own advantage to the manager of the Dublin theatre." Almost immediately after its production several of the scenes were "adapted" and acted in France; and it has since been printed, not only in innumerable editions in England, but translated into every European language. Nor is there, we may say, any new play, unattended by special stimulation of adventitious interest, which is still so certain of securing "a good house."

In the same year in which this masterpiece came into being, and moved by the same necessities, Sheridan produced the last of his dramatic compositions—a work which has, perhaps, occasioned more innocent amusement and cordial laughter than any other of the kind in the language, and has furnished us with more allusions and illustrations than anything else out of Shakspeare. *The Critic* is, of all Sheridan's plays, the one which has least claim to originality. Although it is no copy, nor can be accused of plagiarism, it is the climax of a series of attempts descending downwards from the Elizabethan era, when the *Knight of the Burning Pestle* was performed amid the running commentaries of the homely critics; and it could scarcely have died out of the recollection of Sheridan's audience that Fielding had over and over again made the same attempt in the previous generation. But what his predecessors had tried with different degrees of success—or failure—Sheridan accomplished triumphantly. The humours of the *Rehearsal*, still sufficiently novel to himself to retain all their whimsical originality, he alone had the power so to set upon the stage that all that is ludicrous in dramatic representation is brought before us—but with so much dramatic success that the criticism becomes only a more subtle kind of applause, and in the act of making the theatre ridiculous he makes it doubly attractive. This amusing paradox is carried out with the utmost skill and boldness. In the *School for Scandal* Sheridan had held his audience in delighted suspense in scene after scene which had merely the faintest link of connexion with the plot of his play, and did little more than interrupt its action. But in the new work he held the stage for nearly half the progress of the piece by the mere power of pointed and pungent remarks, the keen

interchanges of witty talk, the personality of three or four individuals not sufficiently developed to be considered as impersonations of character, and with nothing to do but to deliver their comments upon matters of literary interest. Rarely has a greater feat been performed on the stage. We are told that Sir Fretful Plagiary was intended for Cumberland, that Dangle meant somebody else, and that this it was that gave the chief interest to the first portion of the play. But what did the multitude care about Cumberland? Should it occur to any clever playwright of our day to produce upon the stage a caricature of one of our poets—we humbly thank Heaven, much greater personages than Cumberland—a cultivated audience for the first two or three nights might enjoy the travesty. But London, on the whole, when it had once gazed at the imitated great man, would turn away without an attempt to suppress the yawn which displayed its indifference. No popular audience anywhere would be moved by such an expedient—and only a popular audience can secure the success of a play. It was not Cumberland: it was not the theatrical enthusiast represented by Dangle. Nothing can be more evanescent than successes produced by such means. And this was a vigorous and healthy success, not an affair of the coteries. It is all the more astonishing because the play on words is somewhat elaborate, the speeches in many cases long-winded, and the subjects discussed of no general human interest. Indeed, Mr. Puff's elaborate description of puffing, when subjected to the test of reading, is, it must be confessed, a little tedious: which is, of all the sins of the stage, the most unpardonable. Supposing any young dramatist of the present day to carry such a piece to a stage manager, we can imagine the consternation with which his proposal would be received. What! take up

the time of the public with a discussion of literary squabbles, and the passion of an irate author attacked by the press!—expect the world to be amused by the presentation upon the stage even of the most caustic of *Saturday Reviewers*, the sharpest operator of the nineteenth century, although in the very act of baiting a playwright! The young experimentalist would be shown to the door with the utmost celerity. His manuscript would not even be unrolled—in all probability his theatrical friend would read him a lecture upon his utter misconception of the purposes of the stage. “My dear sir,” we can imagine him saying, with that mixture of blandness and impatience with which a practical man encounters an idealist, “there cannot be a greater mistake than to suppose that the world cares for what literary persons say of each other. Your testy old gentleman might be bearable if he had a daughter to marry, or a son to disinherit; but all this noise and fury about a review! Tut! the audience would be bored to death.” And so any sensible adviser would say. Yet Sir Fretful, between his two tormentors, and the cheerful bustle and assured confidence of Mr. Puff, have held their ground when hundreds of sensational dramas have drooped and died. Never was a more wonderful literary feat. The art of puffing has been carried to a perfection unsuspected by Mr. Puff, and not one person in a thousand has the most remote idea who Cumberland was; but *The Critic* is as delightful as ever, and we listen to the gentlemen talking with as much relish as our grandfathers did. Nay, the simplest-minded audience, innocent of literature, and perhaps not very sure what it all means, will still answer to the touch and laugh till they cry over the poor author’s wounded vanity and the woes of Tilburina. Shakspeare, it is evident, found the machinery cumbrous, and gave up

the idea of making Sly and his mockers watch the progress of the *Taming of the Shrew*; and Beaumont and Fletcher lose our interest altogether in their long-drawn-out by-play, though the first idea of it is comical in the highest degree. Nor could Fielding keep the stage with his oft-repeated efforts, notwithstanding the wit and point of many of his dialogues. But Sheridan at last, after so many attempts, found out the right vein. It is evident by the essays made in his own boyhood that the subject had attracted him from a very early period. His lively satire, keen as lightning, but harmless as the flashing of the summer storm which has no thunder in it, finds out every crevice in the theatrical mail. When he has turned the author outside in, and exposed all his little weaknesses (not without a sharper touch here, for it is Mr. Puff, the inventor of the art of advertising as it was in those undeveloped days, and not any better man, who fills the place of the successful dramatist), he turns to the play itself with the same delightful perception of its absurdities. The bits of dialogue which are interposed sparkle like diamonds:

“*Sneer.* Pray, Mr. Puff, how came Sir Christopher Hatton never to ask that question before?

“*Puff.* What, before the play began? How the plague could he?

“*Dangle.* That’s true, i’faith!”

And again:

“*Dangle.* Mr. Puff, as he knows all this, why does Sir Walter go on telling him?

“*Puff.* But the audience are not supposed to know anything of the matter, are they?

“*Sneer.* True; but I think you manage ill; for there certainly appears no reason why Sir Walter should be so communicative.

“*Puff.* Fore Gad, now, that is one of the most ungrateful obser-



vations I ever heard!—for the less inducement he has to tell all this, the more I think you ought to be obliged to him, for I'm sure you'd know nothing of the matter without it.

"*Dangle*. That's very true, upon my word."

In these interpolations every word tells; but there is no malice in the laughing champion who strikes so full in the centre of the shield, and gets such irresistible fooling out of the difficulties of his own art. It is amusing to remember—though Leigh Hunt, in his somewhat shrill and bitter sketch of Sheridan, points it out with unfriendly zeal—that the sentimental dreams which he afterwards prepared for the stage were of the very order which he here exposed to the laughter of the world. "It is observable, and not a little edifying to observe," says this critic, "that when those who excel in a spirit of satire above everything else come to attempt serious specimens of the poetry and romance whose exaggerations they ridicule, they make ridiculous mistakes of their own, and of the very same kind: *so allied is habitual want of faith with want of all higher power*. The style of the *Stranger* is poor and pick-thank enough; but *Pizarro* in its highest flights is downright booth at a fair—a tall, spouting gentleman in tinsel." The words in italics are worthy of Joseph Surface. But the more sympathetic reader will be glad to remember that *Pizarro* has passed out of the recollection of the world so completely that no one but a biographer or unfriendly critic would ever think nowadays of associating it with Sheridan's name. "Serious specimens of poetry and romance" were entirely out of his way. The most extravagant of his admirers has never claimed for him any kindred with the Shakspearian largeness which makes Lear and Touchstone members of the same vast family. That Sheridan himself, when driven to it, fell into the

lowest depths of dramatic bathos need not injure our appreciation of his delightful and light-hearted mockery and exposure of all its false effects. In *The Critic* he is at the height of his powers; his keen sense of the ridiculous might have, though we do not claim it for him, a moral aim, and be directed to the reformation of the theatre; but his first inspiration came from his own enjoyment of the humours of the stage and perception of its whimsical incongruities. No doubt, however, he was weighed down by the preposterous dramas which were submitted to him for the use of the company at Drury Lane when he broke forth into this brilliant piece of fun and mockery. It afforded a most useful lesson to the dramatical writers then abusing their prerogative and filling the stage with bathos and highflown folly; and there is no reason why we should refuse to Sheridan the credit of a good purpose, as well as of a most amusing and in no way ill-natured extravaganza, admirably true, so far as it goes, and skimming the surface of society and of some developments of human nature with an unerring hand.

Another of the many strange anecdotes told of Sheridan's dilatoriness and headlong race against time at the end is connected with the composition of *The Critic*. It is perfectly in keeping with his character, but it must not be forgotten that it was his policy to suffer such tales to be current, and even to give them a certain amount of justification. *The Critic* was announced and talked of long before its completion, nay, before it was begun—not a singular event, perhaps, in dramatic experience. It was then sent to the theatre in detached scenes, as had been the case with the *School for Scandal*. Finally a definite date was fixed for its appearance—the 30th of October; but when the 26th had arrived the work, to the despair

of everybody connected with the theatre, was still incomplete.

We quote from *Sheridaniana*, an anonymous publication, intended to make up the deficiencies of Moore's life, the following account of the amusing expedient by which the conclusion was accomplished :

"Dr. Ford and Mr. Linley, the joint proprietors, began to get nervous and uneasy, and the actors were absolutely *au désespoir*, especially King, who was not only stage-manager, but had to play Puff. To him was assigned the duty of hunting down and worrying Sheridan about the last scene. Day after day passed, until the last day but two arrived, and still it did not make its appearance. At last Mr. Linley, who, being his father-in-law, was pretty well aware of his habits, hit upon a stratagem. A night rehearsal of *The Critic* was ordered, and Sheridan, having dined with Linley, was prevailed to go. When they were on the stage King whispered to Sheridan that he had something particular to communicate, and begged he would step into the second greenroom. Accordingly Sheridan went, and found there a table, with pens, ink, and paper, a good fire, an arm-chair at the table, and two bottles of claret, with a dish of anchovy sandwiches. The moment he got into the room King stepped out and locked the door; immediately after which Linley and Ford came up and told the author that until he had written the scene he would be kept where he was. Sheridan took this decided measure in good part: he ate the anchovies, finished the claret, wrote the scene, and laughed heartily at the ingenuity of the contrivance."

We have the less compunction in quoting an anecdote, vouched for only by anonymous witnesses, that there can be little doubt it was a kind of story which Sheridan would have given no contradiction to. The dash of sudden creation making up for long neglect of duty was the conventional-mode of procedure for such a man. To discuss the immorality of such a mode of action would be altogether out of place here. Every evasion of duty is

due to some sort of selfishness; but the world has always been indulgent (up to a certain point) of the indolent and vagrant character which is conjoined with a capacity for great work in an emergency, and, so long as the thing is done, and done with such brilliancy at last, will condone any irregularity in the doing of it.

The result, it is said, of *The Critic* was immediately apparent. For some time after its production the old type of tragedy became impossible, at least at Drury Lane. Dramas in which "the heroine was found to be forestalled by Tilburina" could not be any great loss to the stage; and it is amusing to realise the aspect of an audience fresh from *The Critic*, when such a tragedy was placed on the boards, while the spectators vainly struggled to shut out a recollection of the Governor opposing his honour to all the seductions of his daughter, or Whiskerandos refusing to die again on any entreaty, from their minds. It was little wonder if all the craft were furious, and the authors—whose productions were chased by laughter from the stage—could not find any abuse bitter enough for Sheridan.

There was, unfortunately, very good cause for complaint on other grounds. To speak of his habits of business as being bad would be absurd, for he had no business habits at all. His management of the theatre when it fell into his hands was as discreditable as could be. He allowed everything to go to confusion, and letters and the manuscripts submitted to him, and every application relating to the theatre, to accumulate, till even the cheques for which he sent to his treasury, and which he had a thousand uses for, were confounded in the general heap and lost to him, till some recurring incident or importunate applicant made an examination of these stores a necessity. It is some-

what difficult to make out how far and how long, or if ever, he was himself responsible for the stage-management; but all the business of the theatre went to confusion in his hands, and it would appear that at first at least the company took example by the disorderly behaviour of their head. Garrick, who had hoped so highly from the new proprietor and done so much for him, had to apologise as he could for a state of things which looked like chaos come again. "Everybody is raving against Sheridan for his supineness," cries one of Garrick's correspondents; and the unfortunate Hopkins, the prompter, whose "Amen!" upon the end of the manuscript we have described, affords us a picture of the kingdom of misrule which existed at Drury Lane which is pitiful enough:

"We played last night *Much Ado About Nothing*" [writes this martyr], "and had to make an apology for the three principal parts. About twelve o'clock Mr. Henderson sent word that he was not able to play. We got Mr. Louis, from Covent Garden, who supplied the part of Benedick. Soon after Mr. Parsons sent word he could not play. Mr. Moody supplied the part of Dogberry; and about four in the afternoon Mr. Vernon sent word he could not play. Mr. Mattock supplied his part of Balthazar. I thought myself very happy in getting these wide gaps so well stopped. In the middle of the first act a message was brought to me that Mr. Lamash, who was to play the part of Borachio, was not come to the house. I had nobody then who could go on for it, so I was obliged to cut two scenes in the first and second act entirely out, and get Mr. Wrighton to go on for the piece. At length we got the play over without the audience finding it out. We had a very bad house. Mr. Parsons is not able to play in the *School for Scandal* to-morrow night: do not know how we shall be able to settle that. I hope the pantomime may prove successful, and release us from this dreadful situation."

This was the condition into which the orderly and well-governed theatre had fallen soon after Garrick resigned

into Sheridan's younger and, as he hoped, better hands—the young Hercules who was to succeed old Atlas in carrying the weight of the great undertaking on his shoulders, his kingdom and authority. The receipts, that infallible thermometer of theatrical success, soon began to fail, and everything threatened destruction, which was averted violently by the production one after the other of Sheridan's two plays, only to fall back into wilder chaos afterwards. For some part of this time the elder Sheridan—who, after their reconciliation, had engaged with his son as one of the members of the company—was stage-manager. It is pleasant to see the claims of nature thus acknowledged, and to have this practical proof that Sheridan still believed in his father's talents and capabilities; but it does not seem to have been a fortunate attempt. Thomas Sheridan is said to have been as harsh as his son was easy and disorderly. His highest effort in his profession had been made in the hope of rivalling the great actor, with whose name and fame and all the traditions of his method Drury Lane was filled. He was an elocutionist, and believed salvation to depend upon a certain measure of delivery which he had himself invented and perfected, and concerning which he was at once an enthusiast and a pedant. To introduce such a man to the little despotism of a theatre, and set him over the members of an opposite faction in his art, was, even when tempered by the mildness of Linley, a desperate expedient, and his reign did not last very long. Whether it returned to Sheridan's own shiftless hands before a more competent head was found it is difficult to make out; but at all events it was long enough under his disorderly sway to turn everything upside down. The ridiculous story referred to above about the authorship of the *School for Scandal* was sup-

ported by the complaints of authors whose manuscript dramas had never been returned to them, and to whom it was easy to say that Sheridan had stolen their best ideas and made use of them as his own. A portion of one of the first scenes in *The Critic*, which is now out of date, and which, indeed, many people may read without any real understanding of what it refers to, makes special reference to complaints and animadversions of this kind. Sir Fretful announces that he has sent his play to Covent Garden :

"*Sneer*. I should have thought, now, it would have been better cast (as the actors call it) at Drury Lane.

"*Sir Fret*. Oh lud, no! never send a play there while I live. Hark'ye [*whispers Sneer*].

"*Sneer*. Writes himself! I know he does—

"*Sir Fret*. I say nothing. I take away from no man's merit, am hurt at no man's good-fortune. I say nothing. But this I will say: through all my knowledge of life I have observed that there is not a passion so strongly rooted in the human heart as envy.

"*Sneer*. I believe you have reason for what you say, indeed.

"*Sir Fret*. Besides—I can tell you it is not always safe to leave a play in the hands of those who write themselves.

"*Sneer*. What! they may steal from them, my dear Plagiary?

"*Sir Fret*. Steal! to be sure they may; and, egad! serve your best thoughts as gipsies do stolen children, disfigure them to make them pass for their own—

"*Sneer*. But your present work is a sacrifice to Melpomene, and he, you know—

"*Sir Fret*. That's no security: a dexterous plagiarist may do anything. Why, sir, for aught I know, he might take out some of the best things in my tragedy and put them into his own comedy."

Thus it is apparent Sheridan himself was perfectly conscious of the things that were said about him. He gave no contradiction, it is said, to the absurd story about the *School for Scandal*—how should he? To such an

extraordinary accusation a contemptuous silence was the best answer. But it is with an easy good-humour, a laugh of the most cheerful mockery, that he confronts the bitter gossip which suggests the unsafeness of leaving manuscripts in his hands. He was not himself ashamed of his sins in this respect. His bag of letters all jumbled together, his table covered with papers, the suitors who waited in vain for a hearing, the business that was done by fits and starts in the interval of his other engagements—all this did not affect his conscience. Cumberland, as if to prove his identity with Sheridan's sketch, describes in a letter to Garrick the ways of the new manager; and the reader will see by this brief paragraph how like was the portrait. "I read," said the dramatist, "the tragedy in the ears of the performers on Friday morning. I was highly flattered by the audience, but your successor in the management is not a representative of your polite attention to authors on such occasions, for he came in yawning at the fifth act with no other apology than having sat up two nights running. It gave me not the slightest offence, as I put it all to the habit of dissipation and indolence; but I fear his office will suffer from want of due attention," Sir Fretful adds.

This was within a few years of Sheridan's entry upon the property and responsibility of the theatre. All that he possessed—which means all that he had by miraculous luck and by mysterious means, which no one has ever been able to fathom, scraped together—was embarked in it. It had enabled him to enter at once upon a way of living and into a sphere of society in which the son of the needy player and lecturer, the idle youth of Bath, without a profession or a penny—the rash lover who had married without the most distant prospect of being able to main-



tain his wife, yet haughtily forbidden her to exercise her profession and maintain him—could never have expected to find himself. If ever man had an inducement to devote himself to the cultivation of the extraordinary opportunities which had been thus given to him, it was he. But he had never been trained to devote himself to anything, and the prodigality of good-fortune which had fallen upon him turned his head, and made him believe, no doubt, that everything was to be as easy as the beginning. Garrick had made a great fortune from the theatre, and there was every reason to suspect that Sheridan, so easily proved the most successful dramatist of his day, might do still more. But Sheridan, alas! had none of the qualities which were requisite for this achievement; even in composition he had soon reached the length of his tether. Twice he was able to make up brilliantly by an almost momentary effort for the bad effects of his carelessness in every practical way. But it is not possible for any man to go on doing this for ever, and the limit of his powers was very soon reached. If he had kept to his own easy trade and sphere, and refrained from public life and all its absorbing cares, would he have continued periodically to re-make his own fortune and that of the theatre by a new play? Who can tell? It is always open to the spectator to believe that such might have been the case, and that Sheridan, put into harness like a few greater spirits, might have maintained an endless stream of production, as Shakspeare did. But there are indications of another kind which may lead critics to decide differently. Sheridan's view of life was not a profound one. It was but a vulgar sort of drama, a problem without any depths—to be solved by plenty of money and wine and pleasure, by youth and high spirits, and an easy lavishness which

was called liberality, or even generosity as occasion served. But to Sheridan there was nothing to find out in it, any more than there is anything to find out in the characters of his plays. He had nothing to say further. Lady Teazle's easy penitence, her husband's pardon, achieved by the elegant turn of her head seen through the open door, and the entry of Charles Surface into all the good things of this life, in recompense for an insolent sort of condescending gratitude to his egotistical old uncle, were all he knew on this great subject. And when that was said he had turned round upon the stage, the audience, the actors, and the writers who catered for them, and made fun of them all with the broadest mirth, and easy indifference to what might come after. What was there more for him to say? *The Critic*, so far as the impulse of creative energy, or what, for want of a better word, we call genius, was concerned, was Sheridan's last word.

It was during this period of lawlessness and misrule at Drury, while either Sheridan himself or his father was holding the sceptre of unreason there, that Garrick died. He had retired from the theatre only a few years before, and had watched it with anxious interest ever since, no doubt deeply disappointed by the failure of the hopes which he had founded upon the new proprietorship and the brilliant young substitute whom he had helped to put into his own place. Sheridan followed him to the grave as chief mourner—and his impressionable nature being strongly touched by the death of the man who had been so good to him, shut himself up for a day or two, and wrote a monody to Garrick's memory, which met with much applause in its day. It was seemly that some tribute should be paid to the great actor's name in the theatre of which he had for so long

been the life and soul, though Sheridan's production of his own poem at the end of the play which was then running, as an independent performance and sacrifice to the *manes* of his predecessor, was a novelty on the stage. It was partly said and partly sung, and must have been on the whole a curious interlude in its solemnity amid the bustle and animation of the evening's performance. As a poem it is not remarkable, but it is the most considerable of Sheridan's productions in that way. The most characteristic point in it is the complaint of the evanescence of an actor's fame and reputation, which was very appropriate to the moment, though perhaps too solemn for the occasion. After recording the honours paid to the poet and painter, he contrasts their lasting fame with the temporary reputation of the heroes of the stage :

"The actor only shrinks from time's award ;  
 Feeble tradition is his mem'ry's guard ;  
 By whose faint breath his merits must abide,  
 Unvouch'd by proof—to substance unallied !  
 E'en matchless Garrick's art to heaven resign'd,  
 No fix'd effect, no model leaves behind !  
 The grace of action, the adapted mien,  
 Faithful as nature to the varied scene ;  
 The expressive glance whose subtle comment draws  
 Entranced attention and a mute applause ;  
 Gesture which marks, with force and feeling fraught,  
 A sense in silence and a will in thought ;  
 Harmonious speech whose pure and liquid tone  
 Gives verse a music scarce confess'd its own.

\* \* \* \* \*

All perishable! like th' electric fire,  
 But strike the frame—and as they strike expire ;  
 Incense too pure a bodied flame to bear,  
 Its fragrance charms the sense and blends with air.

Where, then—while sunk in cold decay he lies,  
And pale eclipse for ever seals those eyes—  
Where is the blest memorial that ensures  
Our Garrick's fame? Whose is the trust?—'tis yours!"

No one would grudge Garrick all the honour that could be paid him on the stage where he had been so important a figure. But that the fame of the actor should be like incense which melts in the air and dies is very natural, notwithstanding Sheridan's protest. The poetry which inspires him is not his, nor the sentiments to which he gives expression. He is but an interpreter; he has no claim of originality upon our admiration. But Garrick, if any man, has had a reputation of the permanent kind. His name is as well known as that of Pope or Samuel Johnson. His generation, and the many notable persons in it, gave him a sort of worship in his day. He was buried in Westminster Abbey, his pall borne by noble peers, thirty-four mourning coaches in all the panoply of woe following, "while the streets were lined with groups of spectators falling in with the train as it reached the Abbey." And up to this day we have not forgotten Garrick. He died in 1779, just four years after the beginning of Sheridan's connection with the theatre. The *Monody* came in between the *School for Scandal* and *The Critic*, the keenest satire and laughter alternating with the dirge, which, however, was only permitted for a few nights—the audience in general have something else to do than to amuse itself by weeping over the lost.

It must have been shortly after this solemn performance that the theatre found a more suitable manager in the person of King, the actor; and though Sheridan never ceased to harass and drain it, yet the business of every day began to go on in a more regular manner. His father

retired from the head of affairs, and he had, fortunately, too much to do cultivating pleasure and society to attempt this additional work—even with the assistance of his Betsey, who seems to have done him faithful service through all these early years. He was still but twenty-nine when his growing acquaintance with statesmen and interest in political affairs opened to the brilliant young man, whom everybody admired, the portals of a more important world.

## CHAPTER IV.

### PUBLIC LIFE.

WHILE Sheridan was completing his brief career in literature, and bringing fortune and fame to one theatre after another by the short series of plays, each an essay of a distinct kind in dramatic composition, which we have discussed, his position had been gradually changing. It had been from the beginning, according to all rules of reason, a perfectly untenable position. When he established himself in London with his beautiful young wife they had neither means nor prospects to justify the life which they immediately began to lead, making their house, which had no feasible means of support, into a sort of little social centre, and collecting about it a crowd of acquaintances, much better off than they, out of that indefinite mass of society which is always ready to go where good talk and good music are to be had, to amuse themselves at the cost of the rash entertainers, who probably believe they are "making friends" when they expend all their best gifts upon an unscrupulous, though fashionable, mob. Nothing could be more unwarrantable than this outset upon an existence which was serious to neither of them, and in which wit and song were made the servants of a vague and shifting public which took everything and gave nothing. Society (in words) judges leniently the foolish victims who thus

immolate themselves for its pleasure, giving them credit for generosity and other liberal virtues; but it is to be feared that the excitement of high animal spirits, and the love of commotion and applause, have more to do with their folly than kindness for their fellow-creatures. The two young Sheridans had both been brought up in an atmosphere of publicity, and to both of them an admiring audience was a sort of necessity of nature. And it is so easy to believe, and far easier then than now, that to "make good friends" is to make your fortune. Sheridan was more fortunate than it is good for our moral to admit any man to be. His rashness, joined to his brilliant social qualities, seemed at first—even before dramatic fame came in to make assurance sure—likely to attain the reward for which he hoped, and to bring the world to his feet. But such success, if for the moment both brilliant and sweet, has a Nemesis from whose clutches few escape.

It is evident that there were some connections of his boyish days, Harrow schoolfellows, who had not forgotten him, or were ready enough to resume old acquaintance—and gay companions of the holiday period of Bath, among whom was no less a person than Windham—who helped him to the friendship of others still more desirable. Lord John Townshend, one of these early friends, brought him acquainted with the most intimate and distinguished of his after-associates—the leader with whom the most important part of his life was identified. It was thus that he formed the friendship of Fox:

"I made [Townshend writes] the first dinner-party at which they met, having told Fox that all the notions he might have conceived of Sheridan's talents and genius from the comedy of *The Rivals*, etc., would fall infinitely short of the admiration of his astonishing powers which I was sure he would entertain at the first interview. The

first interview between them—there were very few present, only Tickell and myself, and one or two more—I shall never forget. Fox told me after breaking up from dinner that he always thought Hare, after my uncle, Charles Townshend, the wittiest man he ever met with, but that Sheridan surpassed them both infinitely; and Sheridan told me next day that he was quite lost in admiration of Fox, and that it was a puzzle to him to say what he admired most, his commanding superiority of talent and universal knowledge, or his playful fancy, artless manners, and benevolence of heart, which showed itself in every word he uttered.”

At very nearly the same time Sheridan became acquainted with Burke. Dr. Johnson himself, it is said, proposed him as a member of the Literary Club, and his friendship and connection with Garrick must have introduced him widely among the people whom it is distinction to know. “An evening at Sheridan’s is worth a week’s waiting for,” Fox is reported to have said. The brilliant young man with his lovely wife was such a representative of genius as might have dazzled the wisest. He had already made the most brilliant beginning, and who could tell what he might live to do, with the world still before him, vigorous health and undaunted spirits, and all the charm of personal fascination to enhance those undeniable powers which must have appeared far greater then, in the glow of expectation, and lustre of all they were yet to do, than we know them now to have been? And when he stepped at once from the life, without any visible means, which he had been living, to the position of proprietor of Drury Lane, with an established occupation and the prospect of certain fortune, there seemed nothing beyond his legitimate ambition, as there was nothing beyond his luxury and hospitality, and lavish enjoyment. Social success so great and rapid is always rare, and the contrast between the former life of the poor player’s penniless son, walking



the streets of Bath in idleness, without a sixpence in his pocket, and that of the distinguished young dramatist on the edge of public life, making a close alliance with two of the first statesmen of the day, invited everywhere, courted everywhere, must have been overwhelming. If his head had been turned by it, and the head of his Eliza (or his Betsey, as he calls her, with magnanimous disdain of finery), who could have been surprised? That his foundations were altogether insecure, and the whole fabric dangerous and apt to topple over like a house of cards, was not an idea which, in the excitement of early triumph, he was likely to dwell upon.

He had, as is evident from the scattered fragments which Moore has been careful to gather up, a fancy for politics and discussion of public matters at an early period, and intended to have collected and published various essays on such subjects shortly after his marriage. At least, it is supposed that the solemn announcement made to Linley of "a book" on which he had been "very seriously at work," which he was just then sending to the press, "and which I think will do me some credit, if it leads to nothing else," must have meant a collection of these papers. Nothing more was ever heard of it, so far as appears; but they were found by his biographer among the chaos of scraps and uncompleted work through which he had to wade. Among these, Moore says, "are a few political letters, evidently designed for the newspapers, some of them but half copied out, and probably never sent, . . ." and "some commencements of periodical papers under various names, *The Dictator*, *The Dramatic Censor*, etc., none of them apparently carried beyond the middle of the first number;" among which, oddly enough—a strange subject for Captain Absolute to take in hand—"is a letter to the

Queen recommending the establishment of an institution for the instruction and maintenance of young females in the better classes of life, who, from either the loss of their parents or poverty, are without the means of being brought up suitably to their station," to be founded on the model of St. Cyr, placed under the patronage of her Majesty, and entitled "The Royal Sanctuary." This fine scheme is supported by eloquence thoroughly appropriate at once to the subject in such hands, and to the age of the writer. "The dispute about the proper sphere of women is idle," he says. "That men should have attempted to draw a line for their orbit shows that God meant them for comets, and above our jurisdiction. With them the enthusiasm of poetry and idolatry of love is the simple voice of nature." . . . "How can we be better employed," the young man adds, with a lofty inspiration which puts all modern agitations on the subject to shame, "than in perfecting that which governs us? The brighter they are the more shall we be illumined. Were the minds of all women cultivated by inspiration men would become wiser, of course. They are a sort of pentagraphs with which Nature writes on the heart of man: what she delineates on the original map will appear on the copy." This fine contribution to the literature of a subject which has taken so important a place among the discussions of to-day would, perhaps, however, scarcely accord with the tone of the arguments now in use.

From this romantic question he diverged into politics proper; and, under the stimulation of London life, and his encounter with the actual warriors of the day, the tide had begun to run so strongly that Sheridan ventured an unwary stroke against the shield which Dr. Johnson had just hung up against all comers in his pamphlet on

the American question. Fortunately for himself, it did not come to anything, for he had intended, it appears, to instance Johnson's partisanship on this occasion as a proof of the effect of a pension, describing "such pamphlets" as "trifling and insincere as the venal quit-rent of a birthday ode," and stigmatising the great writer himself, the Autocrat of the past age, as "an eleemosynary politician who writes on the subject merely because he has been recommended for writing otherwise all his lifetime." Such profanity will make the reader shiver; but, fortunately, it never saw the light, and with easy levity the young dramatist turned round and paid the literary patriarch such a compliment upon the stage as perhaps the secret assault made all the warmer. This was conveyed in a prologue written by Sheridan to a play of Savage:

"So pleads the tale that gives to future times  
The son's misfortunes and the parent's crimes;  
There shall his fame, if own'd to-night, survive,  
Fix'd by the hand that bids our language live."

Another political essay of a less personal character upon the subject of Absenteeism in Ireland also forms one of these unfinished relics. Sheridan was so little of an Irishman in fact that there is not, we think, a single trace even of a visit to his native country from the time he left it as a child, and all his personal interests and associations were in England. But his family had veered back again to the place of their birth, his brother and sisters having settled in Dublin, and no doubt a warmer interest than the common would naturally be in the mind of a man whose veins were warmed by that sunshine which somehow gets into English blood on the other side of the narrow seas. In those elementary days, when Ireland was but beginning

to find out that her woes could have a remedy, Absenteeism was the first and greatest of the evils that were supposed to oppress her, and the optimists of the period were disposed to believe that, could her landlords be persuaded to reside on their estates, all would be well. The changed ideas and extraordinary development of requirements since that simple age make it interesting to quote Sheridan's view of the situation then. He sets before us the system which we at present identify with the tactics rather of Scotch than of Irish landlords, that of sacrificing the people to sheep (since followed by deer), and substituting large sheep-farms for the smaller holdings of the crofters or cotters, with considerable force, although argument on that side of the question has gone so much further and sustained so many changes since then:

“It must ever be the interest of the absentee to place his estate in the hands of as few tenants as possible, by which means there will be less difficulty or hazard in collecting his rents and less entrusted to an agent, if the estate require one. The easiest method of effecting this is by laying out the land for pasturage, and letting it in grass to those who deal only in a ‘fatal living crop,’ whose produce we are not allowed a market for where manufactured, while we want art, honesty, and encouragement to fit it for home consumption. Thus the indolent extravagance of the lord becomes subservient to the interests of a few mercenary graziers—shepherds of most unpastoral principles—while the veteran husbandman may lean on the shattered, unused plough and view himself surrounded with flocks that furnish raiment without food. Or if his honesty be not proof against the hard assaults of penury, he may be led to revenge himself on those ducal innovators of his little field—then learn too late that some portion of the soil is reserved for a crop more fatal even than that which tempted and destroyed him.

“Without dwelling on the particular ill effects of non-residence in this case, I shall conclude with representing that powerful and supreme prerogative which the absentee foregoes—the prerogative

of mercy, of charity. The estated resident is invested with a kind of relieving Providence—a power to heal the wounds of undeserved misfortune, to break the blows of adverse fortune, and leave chance no power to undo the hopes of honest, persevering industry. There cannot surely be a more happy station than that wherein prosperity and worldly interest are to be best forwarded by an exertion of the most endearing offices of humanity. This is his situation who lives on the soil which furnishes him with means to live. It is his interest to watch the devastation of the storm, the ravage of the flood, to mark the pernicious extremes of the elements, and by a judicious indulgence and assistance to convert the sorrows and repinings of the sufferer into blessings on his humanity. By such a conduct he saves his people from the sin of unrighteous murmurs, and makes Heaven his debtor for their resignation.”

It is strange yet not incomprehensible that the course of events should have turned this plaint and appeal to the landlords to unite themselves more closely with their tenants into the present fierce endeavour to get rid of landlords altogether. In the end of last century everybody repeated the outcry. It was the subject of Miss Edgeworth's popular stories, as well as of young Sheridan's first essay in political writing. Perhaps, had the appeal been cordially responded to in those days, there would have been a less dangerous situation, a milder demand, in our own.

These not very brilliant but sensible pages were the first serious attempts of Sheridan, so far as appears, to put together his thoughts upon a political subject. He had shown no particular inclination towards public life in his earlier days; no resort to debating clubs, like that which at a later period brought Canning under the eyes of those in power, is recorded of him. Oratory, in all probability, had been made odious to him by his father's unceasing devotion to his system, and the prominence which the art of elocu-

tion had been made to bear in his early life. And it is a little difficult to make out how it was that, just as he had achieved brilliant success in one career, he should have so abruptly turned to another, and set his heart and hopes on that in preference to every other path to distinction. No doubt a secret sense that in this great sphere there were superior triumphs to be won must have been in his mind. Nobody, so far as we are aware, has ever doubted Sheridan's honesty or the sincerity of his political opinions. At the same time it can scarcely be imagined that the acquaintance of Fox and Burke had not a large share in determining these opinions, and that other hopes and wishes, apart from the impulses of patriotism and public spirit, had not much to do in turning him towards a course of life so little indicated by anything in its beginning. There is no appearance that Sheridan cared very much for literary fame. His taste was not refined nor his mind highly cultivated; he thought, like Byron and George III., that Shakspeare was a much over-rated writer. He was very difficult to please in his own diction, and elaborated both written dialogues and spoken speeches with the most anxious care; but fame as an author was not what he looked for or cared for, nor would such a reputation have answered his purpose. Social success was what he aimed at—he wanted to be among the first, not in intellect, but in fact; to win his way into the highest elevation, and to stand there on an equality with whosoever should approach. For such a fame as this literature, unaided, can do but little. The days of patronage, in which an author was the natural hanger-on and dependent of a great man, are not so dissimilar as they appear to our own; except in so far that the patron in former days paid a more just equivalent for the distinction which his famous hanger-on might give

him. In modern times the poet who is content to swell the train of a great family and get himself into society by that means, gets a very precarious footing in the enchanted circle, and is never recognised as one of the fine people who gave him a great deal of vague praise, but nothing else. This was a sort of favour which Sheridan would never have brooked. He had made that clear from the beginning. He would not creep into favour or wait for invitations into great houses, but boldly and at once took the initiative, and himself invited the great world, and became the host and entertainer of persons infinitely more important than himself. There is no subject on which the easy morality of society has been more eloquent than on the folly of the artist and man of letters who, not content with having all houses thrown open to him, insists upon entertaining in their own persons, and providing for dukes and princes what can be but a feeble imitation, at the best, of their own lordly fare. But we think that the sympathetic reader, when he looks into it, will find many inducements to a charitable interpretation of such seeming extravagance. The artist is received everywhere; he is among, but not of, the most brilliant assemblages, perhaps even he lends them part of their attractions; but even in the very stare with which the fine ladies and fine gentlemen contemplate him he will read the certainty that he is a spectacle, a thing to be looked at—but not one of them. In his own house the balance is redressed, and he holds his fit place. Something of this feeling, perhaps, was in the largeness of hospitality with which Sir Walter Scott threw open his doors, a magnanimous yet half-disdainful generosity, as who should say, "If you will stare, come here and do it, where I am your superior as master of my house, your inferior only out of high courtesy and honour

to my guest." Sheridan was not like Scott, but he was a proud man. And it pleased his sense of humour that the Duchess of Devonshire, still balancing in her mind whether she should receive these young people, should be his guest instead, and have the grace extended to her, instead of first extending it to him. And no doubt his determination to acquire for himself, if by any possibility he could, a position in which he should be on the same level as the greatest—not admitted on sufferance, but an indispensable part of society—had something to do with the earnestness with which he threw himself into public life. The origin of a great statesman is unimportant. Power is a dazzling cloak which covers every imperfection, whereas fame of other kinds but emphasizes and points them out.

This is by no means to say that Sheridan had no higher meaning in his political life. He was very faithful to his party and to Fox, and later to the less respectable patron with whom his name is associated, with little reward of any kind. But he was not an enthusiast, like Burke, any more than a philosopher, nor was his patriotism or his character worthy to be named along with those of that noble and unfortunate politician, with whom for one period of their lives Sheridan was brought into a sort of rivalry. Burke was at all times a leading and originating spirit, penetrating the surface of things; Sheridan a light-hearted adventurer in politics as well as in life, with keen perceptions and a brilliant way of now and then hitting out a right suggestion, and finding often a fine and effective thing to say. It is impossible, however, to think of him as influencing public opinion in any great or lasting way. He acted on the great stage of public life, on a large scale, the part of the Horatios—nay, let us say the



Mercurios of the theatre—sometimes by stress of circumstances coming to the front with a noble piece of rhetoric or even of pure poetry to deliver once in a way, always giving a brilliancy of fine costume and dazzle and glitter on the second level. If the motives which led him to that greatest of arenas were not solely the ardours of patriotism, they were not the meaner stimulants of self-interest. He had no thought of making his fortune out of his country; if he hoped to get advancement by her, and honour, and a place among the highest, these desires were at least not mercenary, and might with very little difficulty be translated into that which is still considered a lofty weakness—that which Milton calls the last infirmity of noble minds—a desire for fame. It is easy to make this pursuit look very fine and dazzling: it may be mean enough, on the other hand.

It was in 1780, when he was twenty-nine, that Sheridan entered Parliament. It was his pride that he was not brought in for any pocket borough, but was elected by the town of Stafford, in which the freemen of the burgh had the privilege of choosing their member. How they exercised that choice—agreeably, no doubt, to themselves, and very much so to the candidate, whose path was thus extraordinarily simplified—may be seen in the account of Sheridan's election expenses, where there is one such broad and simple entry as the following: "248 *Burgesses, paid £5 5s. each.*" A petition against his return and that of his colleague was not unnaturally presented, but came to nothing, and Sheridan's first speech was made in his own defence. It was not a very successful one. The House, attracted by his reputation in other scenes, and by the name, which by this time was so well known in society, heard him "with particular attention;" but he, whose

future appearances were to carry with them the enthusiastic applauses of the most difficult audience in England, had to submit to the force of ridicule, which he himself so often and so brilliantly applied in after times, and to that still more appalling ordeal, the chill attention and disappointment of his hearers. He is said to have rushed up to the reporters' gallery, where Woodfall was busy with his notes, and to have asked his opinion. "I am sorry to say I do not think this is your line," said that candid friend; "you had much better have stuck to your former pursuits." On hearing which Sheridan rested his head on his hands for a few minutes, and then vehemently exclaimed, "It is in me, however, and, by G—, it shall come out!" The quiver of disappointment, excitement, and determination in this outcry is very characteristic. It did come out, and that at no very great interval, as everybody knows.

Sheridan entered political life at a time when it was full of commotion and conflict. The American war was in full progress, kept up by the obstinacy of the King and the subserviency of his Ministers against almost all the better feeling of England, and in face of a steadily increasing opposition, which extended from statesmen like Burke and Fox down to the other extremity of society—to the Surrey peasant who was William Cobbett's father, and who "would not have suffered his best friend to drink success to the King's arms." Politics were exceptionally keen and bitter, since they were in a great measure a personal conflict between a small number of men pitted against each other—men of the same training, position, and traditions, but split into two hereditary factions, and contending fiercely for the mastery—while the nation had little more to do with it than to stand at a

distance vaguely looking on, with no power of action, and even an imperfect knowledge of the proceedings of Parliament, which was supposed to represent and certainly did rule them. That the public had any right at all to a knowledge of what was going on in the debates of the two Houses, was but a recent idea, and still the reports were to the highest degree meagre and unsatisfactory; while the expression of public feeling through the newspapers was still in a very early stage. But within the narrow circle which held power, and which also held the potential criticism which is the soul of party in England, the differences of opinion were heightened by personal emulations, and violent oppositions existed between men of whom we find a difficulty in discovering now why it was that they did not work continuously side by side, instead of, with spasmodic changes, in separate parties. There were points, especially in respect to the representation of the people, in which Pitt was more liberal than Fox; and the Whigs, thenceforward to be associated with every project of electoral reform, were conservative to the highest degree in this respect, and defended their close boroughs with all the zeal of proprietorship. In 1780, when Sheridan entered Parliament, the King took an active part in every act of the Government, with an obedient Minister under his orders, and a Parliament filled with dependents and pensioners. No appeal to the country was possible in those days, or even thought of. No appeal, indeed, was possible anywhere. It was the final battle-ground, where every combatant had his antagonist, and the air was always loud with cries of battle. The Whig party had it very much at heart to reduce the power of the Court, and clear out the accumulated corruptions which stifled wholesome life in the House of Commons; but they

had no very strong desire to widen the franchise or admit the mass of the people to political privileges. Sheridan, indeed, had taken part along with Fox during that very year in a Reform meeting which had passed certain "Resolutions on the state of the representation," advocating the right of the people to universal suffrage and annual parliaments; but it is scarcely possible to believe that their share in it was more than a pleasantry. "Always say that you are for annual parliaments and universal suffrage, then you are safe," Fox is reported to have said, with, no doubt, a twinkle in his eye; while Burke made merry over the still more advanced opinions of some visionary politicians, "who—founding on the latter words of a statute of Edward III. that a parliament should be holden every year once, and more often if need be—were known by the denomination of Ofterner-if-need-bes." "For my part," he would add, "I am an Ofterner-if-need-be." Thus the statesmen jested at their ease, very sure that nothing would come of it, and not unwilling to amuse themselves with schemes so extravagant.

Among the leaders of the party with which Sheridan threw in his fortunes, a very high, perhaps the highest, place was held by Burke, who was in some respects like himself, a man of humble origin, with none of the dignified antecedents possessed by the others, though with a genius superior to them all, and the highest oratorical powers: the countryman, perhaps the model, perhaps the rival, of the new recruit with whom he had so many external points of likeness. It is curious to find two such men, both Irishmen, both in the higher sense of the word adventurers, with the same command of eloquence, at the head of a great English political party at the same moment. There does not seem ever to have been the

same cordiality of friendship between them, notwithstanding, or perhaps in consequence of, the similarity of their circumstances, as existed between each of them and the genial and gracious Fox, whose loveliness and sweetness of nature seem to have vanquished every heart, and kept an atmosphere of pleasantness about him, which breathes through every page in which he is named. To have come at once into the close companionship of such men as these, to be permitted to share their counsels, to add his word to theirs, to unite with them in all their undertakings, and, dearest joy of all, to fight by their side in every parliamentary tumult, and defy the Tories and the Fates along with them, was an elevation which might well have turned the head of the young dramatist, who had so little right to expect any such astonishing advancement.

And the firmament all around this keen and eager centre was gloomy and threatening—in America the war advancing to that stage in which continuance becomes an impossibility, and a climax of one kind or another must be arrived at—in Ireland, which in those days was the Ireland of the Protestant ascendancy, the reverse of everything that calls itself Irish now, a sort of chronic semi-rebellion—in India, where the Company were making their conquests and forming their government in independence of any direct imperial control, a hundred questions arising which would have to be settled ere long—in France, the gathering of the Revolutionary storm, which was soon to burst and affect all the world. A more exciting outlook could not be. The existing generation did not perhaps realise the crowding in of troubles from every side as we do, to whom the whole panorama is rolled out; while naturally there were matters which we take very

calmly, as knowing them to have passed quite innocuously over the great vitality of England, which to them looked dangers unspeakable. But we need not attempt to enter here into that detailed narrative of the political life of the period which would be necessary did we trace Sheridan through every debate he took part in, and every political movement in which he was engaged. This has been recently done in a former volume of this series with a completeness and care which would render a repeated effort of the same character a superfluity, even were the writer bold enough to venture upon such a competition. The political surroundings and events of Burke's public life were to a great extent those of Sheridan also, and it would be almost an impertinence to retrace the ground which Mr. Morley has gone over so thoroughly. We will therefore confine ourselves to an indication of the chief movements in which Sheridan was personally involved, and in which his impetuous eloquence produced an effect which has made his name historical. This result was not immediately attained; but it is evident that the leaders of the party must have very soon perceived how valuable a recruit the young member for Stafford was, since he was carried with them into office after little more than two years of parliamentary life, in the short accession to power of the Whig party after the fall of Lord North. What he had done to merit this speedy elevation it is difficult to see. He was made one of the under-secretaries of state in the Rockingham Ministry, and had to all appearance the ball at his foot. The feeling entertained on this subject by his family, watching from across the Channel with much agitation of hope the extraordinary and unaccountable advance he was making, is admirably set forth in the following letter from his brother:

“I am much obliged to you for your early intelligence concerning the fate of the Ministry, and give you joy on the occasion, notwithstanding your sorrow for the departure of the good Opposition. I understand very well what you mean by this sorrow; but as you may be now in a situation in which you may obtain some substantial advantage to yourself, for God’s sake improve the opportunity to the utmost, and don’t let dreams of empty fame (of which you have had enough in conscience) carry you away from your solid interests. I return you many thanks for Fox’s letter—I mean for your intention to make him write one—for as your good intentions always satisfy your conscience, and that you seem to think the carrying of them into execution to be a mere trifling ceremony, as well omitted as not, your friends must always take the will for the deed. I will forgive you, however, on condition that you will for once in your life consider that though the will alone may perfectly satisfy yourself, your friends would be a little more gratified if they were sometimes to see it accompanied by the deed—and let me be the first upon whom you try the experiment. If the people here are not to share the fate of their patrons, but are suffered to continue in the government of this country, I believe you will have it in your power, as I am certain it will be in your inclination, to fortify my claims upon them, by recommendation from your side of the water, in such a manner as to insure to me what I have a right to expect from them, but of which I can have no certainty without that assistance. I wish the present people may continue here, because I certainly have claims upon them; and considering the footing that Lord C—— and Charles Fox are on, a recommendation from the latter would now have every weight; it would be drawing a bill upon Government here, payable at sight, which they dare not protest. So, dear Dick, I shall rely upon you that this will *really* be done; and, to confess the truth, unless it be done, and speedily, I shall be completely ruined.”

The delightful *naïveté* of this letter, and its half-provoked tone of good advice and superior wisdom, throws a humorous gleam over the situation. That it was Sheridan’s bounden duty “for God’s sake” to take care that no foolish ideas should prevent him from securing substantial advantage to himself, and in the meantime and

at once an appointment for his brother, is too far beyond question to be discussed; but the writer cannot but feel an impatient conviction that Dick is quite capable of neglecting both for some flummery about fame, which is really almost too much to be put up with. Charles Sheridan got his appointment, which was that of Secretary of War in Ireland, a post which he enjoyed for many years. But the "substantial advantage" which he considered it his brother's duty to secure for himself never came.

Sheridan's first taste of the sweets of office was a very short one. The Rockingham Ministry remained in but four months, during which time they succeeded in clearing away a considerable portion of the accumulated uncleanness which had recently neutralised the power of the House of Commons. The measures passed in this brief period dealt a fatal blow at that overwhelming influence of the Crown which had brought about so many disasters, and, by a stern cutting off of the means of corruption, "mark the date when the direct bribery of members absolutely ceased," which is the highest praise. But Lord Rockingham died, and Lord Shelburne succeeded him, who represented but one side of the party, and the withdrawal of Fox from the Ministry brought Sheridan back—it is said partly against his own judgment, which says all the more for his fidelity to his leader—into the irresponsibility and unprofitableness of opposition. The famous Coalition, which came into being a year later, restored him to office as Secretary of the Treasury. Sheridan went on forming his style as a political speaker with great care and perseverance through all these vicissitudes. At first he is said to have written his speeches out carefully, and even learnt them by heart, "using for this purpose," Moore tells us, "the same sort of copy-books



which he had employed in the first rough draughts of his plays." Afterwards a scribble on a piece of paper was enough to guide him, and sometimes it is very evident he made a telling retort or a bold attack without preparation at all. One of these, preserved in the collection of his speeches, has a vivid gleam of restrained excitement and personal feeling in it which gives it an interest more human than political. It occurred in the discussion by the House of the preliminaries of the treaty afterwards known as the Treaty of Versailles, in which the independence of America was formally recognized. In Sheridan's speech on the subject he had referred pointedly to Pitt, who had become Chancellor of the Exchequer in Lord Shelburne's Administration, and who had objected to something in a previous debate as inconsistent with the established usage of the House. "This convinced him," Sheridan said, "that the right honourable gentleman was more a practical politician than an experienced one," and that "his years and his very early political exaltation had not permitted him to look whether there had been precedents, or to acquire a knowledge of the journals of the House." Pitt resented this assault upon his youth as every young man is apt to do, and did his best to turn the war into the enemy's camp. Here is the somewhat ungenerous assault he made—one, however, which has been repeated almost as often as there have been eminent literary men in public life:

"No man admired more than he did the abilities of that right honourable gentleman, the elegant sallies of his thought, the gay effusions of his fancy, his dramatic turns, and his epigrammatic points; and if they were reserved for a proper stage, they would no doubt receive what the honourable gentleman's abilities always did receive, the plaudits of the audience; and it would be his fortune '*sin plausu gaudere theatri.*' But this was not the proper scene for the exhibi-

tion of these elegancies ; and he therefore must beg leave to call the attention of the House to the serious consideration of the very important questions now before them."

This unhandsome reference to Sheridan's theatrical fame was one of those uncalled-for and unworthy attacks which give the person assailed an enormous advantage over the assailant ; and Sheridan was quite equal to the occasion :

"Mr. Sheridan then rose to an explanation, which being made, he took notice of that particular sort of personality which the right honourable gentleman had thought proper to introduce. He need not comment upon it—the propriety, the taste, the gentlemanly point of it, must have been obvious to the House. But, said Mr. Sheridan, let me assure the right honourable gentleman that I do now, and will at any time when he chooses to repeat this sort of allusion, meet it with the most sincere good-humour. Nay, I will say more: flattered and encouraged by the right honourable gentleman's panegyric on my talents, if I ever again engage in the compositions he alludes to, I may be tempted to an act of presumption—to attempt an improvement on one of Ben Jonson's best characters—the character of the Angry Boy, in the *Alchymist*." <sup>1</sup>

Apart from sparrings of this description, however, in which his light hand and touch were always effective, Sheridan gradually proceeded to take a larger part in the business of the House, his speeches being full of energy, lucidity, and point, as well as of unfailing humour. But it was not till the celebrated impeachment of Warren Hastings, one of the most dramatic episodes in parliamentary history, that he rose to the fulness of his eloquence and power. The story of that episode has been often told: almost more often and more fully than any

<sup>1</sup> This threat was carried out by the issue of a pretended play-bill, in which not only was the part of the Angry Boy allotted to Pitt, but the audacious wit proceeded to assign that of Surly to "His ——"!

other chapter of modern history; and everybody knows how and why it was that—having added to the wealth of his chiefs and the power of the nation, and with a consciousness in his mind of having done much to open up and confirm an immense new empire to his country—this Indian ruler and lawgiver, astonished, found himself confronted by the indignation of all that was best and greatest in England, and ere he knew was placed at the bar to account for what he had done, the treasures he had exacted, and the oppressions with which he had crushed the native states and their rulers.

“Is India free? and does she wear her plumed  
And jewelled turban with a smile of peace?  
Or do we grind her still?”

Cowper had said, as he opened his scanty newspaper in the fireside quiet at Olney, some time before. The manner in which such a prize was added to the British crown has slipped from the general memory nowadays, and we are apt to forget how many deeds were done on that argument that would not bear the light of public inquiry. But this great trial will always stand as a proof that the time had arrived in the history of England when she would no longer tolerate the high-handed proceedings of the conqueror, and that even national aggrandisement was not a strong enough inducement to make her overlook injustice and cruelty, though in the ends of the earth.

It was Burke who originated the idea of impeachment for Warren Hastings: it was Pitt, by his unexpected vote with the accusing party, who made it practicable; but Sheridan was the hero of the occasion. One of the worst charges against Hastings was his conduct to the princesses of Oude, the old and helpless Begums whom he

imprisoned and ill-used in order to draw from them their treasures; and this moving subject, the one of all others best adapted for him, it was given to Sheridan to set forth in all the atrocity of its circumstances, and with all the power of eloquent indignation of which he was master, before the House, as one of the grounds for the impeachment. The speech was ill reported, and has not been preserved in a form which does it justice, but we have such details of its effect as have rarely been laid up in history. The following account, corroborated by many witnesses, is taken from the summary given at the head of the extracts from this oration in the collection of Sheridan's speeches:

“For five hours and a half Mr. Sheridan commanded the universal interest and admiration of the House (which, from the expectation of the day, was uncommonly crowded) by an oration of almost unexampled excellence, uniting the most convincing closeness and accuracy of argument with the most luminous precision and perspicuity of language, and alternately giving form and energy to truth by solid and substantial reasoning; and enlightening the most extensive and involved subjects with the purest clearness of logic and the brightest splendours of rhetoric. Every prejudice, every prepossession, was gradually overcome by the force of this extraordinary combination of keen but liberal discrimination; of brilliant yet argumentative wit. So fascinated were the auditors by his eloquence, that when Mr. Sheridan sat down the whole House—the members, peers, and strangers—involuntarily joined in a tumult of applause, and adopted a mode of expressing their admiration, new and irregular in the House, by loudly and repeatedly clapping with their hands. Mr. Burke declared it to be the most astonishing effort of eloquence, argument, and wit united of which there was any record or tradition. Mr. Fox said, ‘All that he had ever heard—all that he had ever read—when compared with it dwindled into nothing, and vanished like vapour before the sun.’ Mr. Pitt acknowledged that it surpassed all the eloquence of ancient or of modern times, and possessed everything that genius or art could furnish to agitate and control the hu-

man mind. The effects it produced were proportioned to its merits. After a considerable suspension of the debate, one of the friends of Mr. Hastings—Mr. Burgess—with some difficulty obtained for a short time a hearing; but, finding the House too strongly affected by what they had heard to listen to him with favour, sat down again. Several members confessed they had come down strongly prepossessed in favour of the person accused, and imagined nothing less than a miracle could have wrought so entire a revolution in their sentiments. Others declared that though they could not resist the conviction that flashed upon their minds, yet they wished to have leave to cool before they were called upon to vote; and though they were persuaded it would require another miracle to produce another change in their opinions, yet for the sake of decorum they thought it proper that the debate should be adjourned. Mr. Fox and Mr. A. Taylor strongly opposed this proposition, contending that it was not less absurd than unparliamentary to defer coming to a vote for no other reason than had been alleged, than because members were too firmly convinced; but Mr. Pitt concurring with the opinions of the former, the debate was adjourned."

What Pitt said was, that they were all still "under the wand of the enchanter;" while other members individually made similar acknowledgments. "Sir William Dalton immediately moved an adjournment, confessing that in the state of mind in which Mr. Sheridan's speech had left him it was impossible for him to give a determinate opinion." That great audience, the most difficult, the most important in Christendom, was overwhelmed like a company of sympathetic women by the quick communicating thrill of intellectual excitement, of generous ardour, of wonder, terror, pity. It was like a fine intoxication which nobody could resist. Here is another amusing instance of the influence it exercised:

"The late Mr. Logan . . . author of a most masterly defence of Mr. Hastings, went that day to the House of Commons prepossessed for the accused, and against the accuser. At the expiration of the first

hour he said to a friend, 'All this is declamatory assertion without proof;' when the second was finished, 'This is a most wonderful oration.' At the close of the third, 'Mr. Hastings has acted most unjustifiably;' the fourth, 'Mr. Hastings is a most atrocious criminal;' and at last, 'Of all monsters of iniquity, the most enormous is Warren Hastings!'

It was no wonder if the astonished members, with a feeling that this transformation was a kind of magic, unaccountable by any ordinary rule, were afraid of themselves, and dared not venture on any practical step until they had cooled down a little. It is the most remarkable instance on record in modern times of the amazing power of oratory. The public interest had flagged in the matter, notwithstanding the vehement addresses of Burke, but it awoke with a leap of excitement at this magic touch; and when, some months later, the trial took place, according to an old and long-disused formula, in Westminster Hall, the whole world flocked to listen. Macaulay has painted the scene for us in one of his most picturesque pages. The noble hall full of noble people; the peers in their ermine; the judges in their red robes; the grey old walls hung with scarlet; the wonderful audience in the galleries; the Queen herself, with all her ladies, among them the lively, weary, little frizzled head with so much in it, of Fanny Burney, prejudiced yet impressionable, looking over her Majesty's shoulder; and such faces as those of the lovely Duchess of Devonshire, the haughty beauty of Mrs. Fitzherbert, the half-angelic sweetness of Sheridan's wife, with many another less known to fame, and all the men whose names confer a glory on their age. "In the midst of the blaze of red draperies an open space had been fitted up with green benches and tables for the Commons." The great commoners who conducted the prosecution, the man-

agers of the impeachment, as they were called, appeared in full dress, even Fox, the negligent, "paying the illustrious tribunal the compliment of wearing a bag and sword." Amidst these public prosecutors the two kindred forms of Burke and Sheridan, both with a certain bluntness of feature which indicated their race, the latter at least, with those brilliant eyes which are so often the mark of genius, were the principal figures.

This wonderful scene lasted for months; and it may be supposed what an exciting entertainment was thus provided for society, ever anxious for a new sensation. Burke spoke for four days, and with great effect. But it was when it came to the turn of Sheridan to repeat his wonderful effort, and once more plead the cause of the robbed and insulted princesses, that public excitement rose to its height. "The curiosity of the public to hear him was unbounded. His sparkling and highly finished declamation lasted two days; but the hall was crowded to suffocation the whole time. It was said that fifty guineas had been paid for a single ticket." His speech, as a matter of fact, extended over four days, and the trial, which had begun in February, had lasted out till June, dragging its slow length along, when it came to this climax. Many of his colleagues considered this speech greatly inferior to the first outburst of eloquence on the same subject with which he had electrified the House of Commons. "Sheridan's speech on the Begums in the House admirable; in Westminster Hall contemptible," Lord Granville said, and such was also the opinion of Fox. But a greater than either was of a different opinion. In the sitting of the House held on the 6th of June, after an exciting morning spent in Westminster Hall, a certain Mr. Burgess, the same pertinacious person who had risen to speak in favour of Hast-

ings, while still St. Stephens was resounding with applause and inarticulate with emotion on the day of Sheridan's first speech, got up once more, while all minds were again occupied by the same subject, to call the attention of the House to some small matter of finance. He was transfixed immediately by the spear of Burke. "He could not avoid offering his warmest congratulations to the honourable gentleman on his having chosen that glorious day, after the triumph of the morning, to bring forward a business of such an important nature," cried the great orator with contemptuous sarcasm; and he went on to applaud the powerful mind of the stolid partisan who had proved himself capable of such an effort, "after every other member had been struck dumb with astonishment and admiration at the wonderful eloquence of his friend, Mr. Sheridan, who had that day again surprised the thousands who hung with rapture on his accents, by such a display of talents as was unparalleled in the annals of oratory, and so did the highest honour to himself, to that House, and to the country."

The reader will be perhaps more interested, in this deluge of applause, to hear how the wife—of whom perhaps Sheridan was not worthy, yet who was not herself without blame, a susceptible creature, with a fine nature always showing under the levities and excitements that circumstances had made natural to her—exulted in his triumph:

"I have delayed writing [the letter is to her sister-in-law] till I could gratify myself and you by sending you the news of our dear Dick's triumph—of our triumph, I may call it—for surely no one in the slightest degree connected with him but must feel proud and happy. It is impossible, my dear woman, to convey to you the delight, the astonishment, the adoration, he has excited in the breasts



of every class of people. Every party prejudice has been overcome by a display of genius, eloquence, and goodness, which no one with anything like a heart about them could have listened to without being the wiser and the better all the rest of their lives. What must *my* feelings be, you only can imagine. To tell you the truth, it is with some difficulty that I can 'let down my mind,' as Mr. Burke said afterwards, to talk or think on that or any other subject. But pleasure too exquisite becomes pain, and I am at this moment suffering from the delightful anxieties of last week."

This triumph, however, like Sheridan's previous successes, would seem to have been won by a fit of accidental exertion; for it was still as difficult as ever to keep him in harness and secure his attention. A letter quoted in Moore's life from Burke to Mrs. Sheridan makes the difficulty very apparent. The great statesman begins by skilful praise of Sheridan's abilities to propitiate his wife; and then implores Mrs. Sheridan's aid in "prevailing upon Mr. Sheridan to be with us this day at half after three in the Committee." The paymaster of Oude was to be examined, he adds, with anxious emphasis: "Oude is Mr. Sheridan's particular province; and I do most seriously ask that he would favour us with his assistance." This proves how little he was to be relied upon, even now, in the very moment of triumph. Yet on the very next page we read of the elaborate manner in which his speech was prepared, and of the exertions of his domestic helpers in arranging and classifying his materials; and he seems from Moore's account to have laboured indefatigably to acquire the necessary knowledge:

"There is a large pamphlet of Mr. Hastings," Moore tells us, "consisting of more than two hundred pages, copied out mostly in her (Mrs. Sheridan's) writing, with some assistance from another female hand. The industry, indeed, of all about him was called into requisition for the great occasion: some busy with the pen and scis-

sors making extracts, some pasting and stitching his scattered memorandums in their places, so that there was scarcely a member of his family that could not boast of having contributed his share to the mechanical construction of this speech. The pride of its success was, of course, equally participated; and Edwards, a favorite servant of Mr. Sheridan, was long celebrated for his professed imitation of the manner in which his master delivered (what seems to have struck Edwards as the finest part of the speech) his closing words, 'My Lords, I have done.'

Macaulay informs us that Sheridan "contrived, with a knowledge of stage effect which his father might have envied, to sink back as if exhausted into the arms of Burke, who hugged him with the energy of generous admiration," when the speech was done.

In every way this was the highest point of Sheridan's career. Engaged in the greatest work to which civilised man can turn his best faculties, the government of his country, either potentially or by criticism, censure, and the restraining power of opposition, he had made his way without previous training, or any adventitious circumstances in his favour, to the very front rank of statesmen. When wrong was to be chastised and right established he was one of the foremost in the work. His party did nothing without him; his irregular ways, the difficulty which there was even in getting him to attend a meeting, were all overlooked. Rather would the Whig leaders invent, like the proprietors of the theatre in former days, a snare in which to take him, or plead with his wife for her assistance, than do without Sheridan. This was what the player's son, the dramatist and stage-manager, who was nobody without education, without fortune, had come to. He was thirty-seven when he stood upon this apex of applause and honour—*al mezzo di cammin di nostra vita*. Had he died then, the wonder of his fame and greatness

would have been lessened by no painful drawback. If he were extravagant, reckless, given to the easier vices, so were other men of his generation—and pecuniary embarrassment only becomes appalling when it reaches the stage of actual want, and when squalor and misery follow in its train. We linger upon the picture of these triumphs—triumphs as legitimate, as noble, and worthy as ever man won—in which, if perhaps there was no such enthusiasm of generous sentiment as moved Burke, there was at least the sincere movement of a more volatile nature against cruelty and injustice. It does not in reality enhance the greatness of a mental effort that it is made in the cause of humanity, but it enormously increases its weight and influence with mankind. And it was an extraordinary piece of good-fortune for Sheridan, in a career made up hitherto of happy hits and splendid pieces of luck, that he should happily have lighted upon a subject for his greatest effort, which should not only afford scope for all his gifts, his impulsive generosity and tender-heartedness, as well, we may add, as that tendency to clap-trap and inflated diction which is almost always successful with the multitude—but at the same time should secure for himself as the magnanimous advocate a large share in that sympathy of the audience for the helpless and injured, which his eloquence raised into temporary passion. His subject, his oratorical power, the real enthusiasm which inspired him, even if that enthusiasm took fire at its own flame, and was more on account of Brinsley Sheridan than of the Begums, all helped in the magical effect. Even poor Mrs. Sheridan, who knew better than any one wherein the orator was defective, exulted in his triumph as “a display of genius, and eloquence, *and goodness.*” He was the champion of humanity, the de-

fender of the weak and helpless. No doubt, in the glow of interest in his own subject to which he had worked himself up, he felt all this more fervently even than his audience, which again added infinitely to his power.

The trial came to nothing, as everybody knows. It lingered over years of tedious discussion, and through worlds of wearisome verbiage, and only got decided in 1795, when the accused, whose sins by this time had been half forgotten, whose foolish plans for himself were altogether out of mind, and whose good qualities had come round again to the recollection of the world, was acquitted. By that time the breaking up of the party which had brought him to the bar, so touchingly described by Macaulay, had come to pass; and though Sheridan still held by Fox, Burke had fallen apart from them both for ever. Professor Smyth, in his valuable little *Memoir of Sheridan*, gives a description of the orator's preparation for the postscriptal speech which he had to deliver six years after, in 1794, in answer to the pleas of Hastings's counsel, which is very characteristic. Sheridan arrived suddenly one evening at the country residence where his son Tom was staying with Smyth, the tutor—with his chaise full of papers—and announced his intention of getting through them all, and being ready with his reply the day after to-morrow. "The day after to-morrow! this day six months you mean," cried Smyth, in consternation. Altogether Sheridan would seem to have taken five or six days to this trying work, recalling the recollection of his highest triumph, and refreshing his memory as to the facts, after a long and sad interval, filled with many misfortunes and downfalls. He never stirred "out of his room for three days and evenings, and each of the three nights, till the motes, he told me, were coming into his eyes, though the strongest and finest that ever

man was blest with," Smyth informs us. He dined every day with the tutor and Tom, the bright and delightful boy who was a sweeter and more innocent reproduction of himself; and during these meals Smyth found that it was his part to listen, "making a slight occasional comment on what he told me he had been doing":

"On the morning appointed he went off early in a chaise-and-four to Grosvenor Street, and none of us, Tom told me, were to come near him till the speech was over. When he came into the manager's box he was in full dress, and his countenance had assumed an ashen colour that I had never before observed. No doubt Cicero himself must have quailed before so immense and magnificent an audience as was now assembled to hear him. He was evidently tried to the utmost, every nerve and faculty within him put into complete requisition."

No doubt Sheridan felt the ghost of his own glory rising up as a rival to him in this renewed and so changed appearance. The tutor felt that "his aspect was that of a perfect orator, and thought he was listening to some being of a totally different nature from himself;" but this postscriptal harangue has had no record of fame. And already the leaf was turned over, the dark side of life come upward, and Sheridan's glory on the wane.

## CHAPTER V.

### MIDDLE AGE.

THE middle of life is the testing-ground of character and strength. There are many who hold a foremost place in the heat of youth, but sink behind when that first energy is played out; and there are many whose follies happily die, and whose true strength is only known when serious existence with its weights and responsibilities comes upon them. Many are the revelations of this sober age. Sins which were but venial in the boy grow fatal in the man. The easy indolence, the careless good-fellowship, the rollicking humour which we laugh at while we condemn them in youth, become coarser, vulgarer, meaner in maturity, and acquire a character of selfishness and brutality which was not theirs in the time of hope. In Sheridan's age, above all others, the sins of a Charles Surface were easily pardoned to a young man. He was better liked for being something of a rake; his prodigality and neglect of all prudent precautions, his rashness in every enterprise, his headlong career, which it was always believed something might turn up to guide into a better development at the end, were proofs of the generosity and truth of a character concealing nothing. All this was natural at five-and-twenty. But at thirty-five, and still more at forty, the world gets weary of Charles Surface. His light-

heartedness becomes want of feeling—his rashness unmanly folly—his shortcomings are everywhere judged by a different standard; and the middle-aged man, whom neither regard for his honour, his duty, nor his family can curb and restrain, who takes his own way, whoever suffers, and is continually playing at the highest stakes for mere life, is deserted by public opinion, and can be defended by his friends with only faltering excuses. Sheridan had been such a man in his youth. He had dared everything, and won much from fate. Without a penny to begin with, or any of that capital of industry, perseverance, and determination which serves instead of money, he got possession of and enjoyed all the luxuries of wealth. He did more than this: he became one of the leading names in England, foremost on imperial occasions, and known wherever news of England was prized or read; and through all his earlier years the world had laughed at his shifts, his hair-breadth escapes, the careless prodigality of nature, which made it certain that by a sudden and violent effort at the end he could always make up for all deficiencies. It was a jest that

“Of wit, of taste, of fancy, we’ll debate,  
If Sheridan for once be not too late.”

And in the artificial world of the theatre the recklessness of the man and all his eccentricities had something in them which suited that abode of strong contrasts and effects. But after a course of years the world began to get tired of always waiting for Sheridan, always finding that he had forgotten his word and his appointments, and never read, much less answered, his letters. There came a moment when everybody with one accord ceased and even refused to be amused by these eccentricities any longer,

and found them to be stale jests, insolences, and characterised by a selfish disregard of everybody's comfort but his own.

This natural protest no doubt was accompanied by a gradual development of all that was most insupportable in Sheridan's nature. The entire absence in him of the faculty of self-control grew with his advancing years; but it was not till Providence had interposed and deprived him of the wife who, in her sweet imperfection, had yet done much for him, that any serious change happened in his fortunes. He lost his father in 1788, very shortly after his great triumph. There is no very evident sign that Thomas Sheridan ever changed his mind in respect to his sons, or ceased to prefer the prim and prudent Charles, who had bidden his brother not to be so foolishly moved by thoughts of fame as to neglect the substantial advantages which office might ensure to him. But it was Richard who attended upon the old man's death-bed, moved with an almost excessive filial devotion and regret, and buried him, and intended to place a fine inscription over him, written by no hand but that of Dr. Parr, the best of scholars. It was never done; but Charles Sheridan (who was present, however, neither at the sick-bed nor the grave) had already intimated the conviction of the family that in Dick's case the will had to be taken for the deed. This loss, however, was little to the greater blow which he suffered a few years later. Mrs. Sheridan is one of those characters who, without doing anything to make themselves remarkable, yet leave a certain fragrance behind them as of something fine, and tender, and delicate. The reader will remember the letter referred to in the first chapter, in which she recounts her early troubles to her sympathising friend, a pretty and sentimental composition;



with a touch of Evelina (who was the young lady's contemporary) in its confidences, and still more of Lydia Languish, whose prototype she might well have been. And there is a certain reflection of Lydia Languish throughout her life, softened by the cessation of sentimental dilemmas, but never without a turn for the romantic. That she was a good wife to Sheridan there seems little doubt: the accounts of the theatre kept in her handwriting, the long and careful extracts made and information prepared by her to help him—even the appeals to her on every side, from her father, anxious about the theatre and its business, up to Mr. Burke, in the larger political sphere, all confident that she would be able to do what nobody else could do, keep Sheridan to an appointment—show what her office was between him and the world. Within doors, of all characters for the reckless wit to enact, he was the Falkland of his own drama, maddening a more hapless Julia, driving her a hundred times out of patience and out of heart with innumerable suspicions, jealousies, harassments of every kind. And no man who lived the life he was living, with the most riotous company of the time, could be a very good husband. He left her to go into society alone, in all her beauty and charm—the St. Cecilia of many worshippers—still elegant, lovely, and sentimental, an involuntary siren, accustomed to homage, and perhaps liking it a little, as most people, even the wisest, do. There could be no want of tenderness to her husband in the woman who wrote the letter of happy pride and adoration quoted in the last chapter; and yet she was not herself untouched by scandal, and it was whispered that a young, handsome, romantic Irishman, in all the glory of national enthusiasm, and with the shadow of tragedy already upon him, had moved her heart. It is

not necessary to enter into any such vague and shadowy tale. No permanent alienation appears to have ever arisen between her and her husband, though there were many painful scenes, consequent upon the too finely-strung nerves, which is often another name for irritability and impatience, of both. Sheridan's sister, who lived in his house for a short time after her father's death, gives us a most charming picture of this sweet and attractive woman:

"I have been here almost a week in perfect quiet. While there was company in the house I stayed in my room, and since my brother's leaving us for Margate I have sat at times with Mrs. Sheridan, who is kind and considerate, so that I have entire liberty. Her poor sister's children are all with her. The girl gives her constant employment, and seems to profit by being under so good an instructor. Their father was here for some days, but I did not see him. Last night Mrs. S. showed me a picture of Mrs. Tickell, which she wears round her neck. . . . Dick is still in town, and we do not expect him for some time. Mrs. Sheridan seems now quite reconciled to those little absences which she knows are unavoidable. I never saw any one so constant in employing every moment of her time, and to that I attribute, in a great measure, the recovery of her health and spirits. The education of her niece, her music, books, and work occupy every moment of the day. After dinner the children, who call her mamma-aunt, spend some time with us, and her manner to them is truly delightful."

Mrs. Tickell was Mrs. Sheridan's younger sister, and died just a year before her. In the mean time she had taken immediate charge of Tickell's motherless children, and the pretty "copy of verses" which she dedicated to her sister's memory embellishes and throws light upon her own:

"The hours, the days pass on; sweet spring returns,  
And whispers comfort to the heart that mourns;

But not to mine, whose dear and cherished grief  
 Asks for indulgence, but ne'er hopes relief.  
 For, oh! can changing seasons e'er restore  
 The loved companion I must still deplore?  
 Shall all the wisdom of the world combined  
 Erase thy image, Mary, from my mind,  
 Or bid me hope from others to receive  
 The fond affection thou alone could'st give?  
 Ah no! my best belov'd, thou still shalt be  
 My friend, my sister, all the world to me.

\* \* \* \* \*

Oh! if the soul released from mortal cares  
 Views the sad scene, the voice of mourning hears,  
 Then, dearest saint, did'st thou thy heaven forego,  
 Linger on earth, in pity to our woe;  
 'Twas thy kind influence soothed our minds to peace,  
 And bade our vain and selfish murmurs cease.  
 'Twas thy soft smile that gave the worshipped clay  
 Of thy bright essence one celestial ray,  
 Making e'en death so beautiful that we,  
 Gazing on it, forgot our misery.  
 Then—pleasing thought!—ere to the realms of light  
 Thy franchised spirit took its happy flight,  
 With fond regard perhaps thou saw'st me bend  
 O'er the cold relics of my heart's best friend;  
 And heard'st me swear, while her dear hand I prest,  
 And tears of agony bedew'd my breast,  
 For her loved sake to act the mother's part,  
 And take her darling infants to my heart,  
 With tenderest care their youthful minds improve,  
 And guard her treasure with protecting love.  
 Once more look down, bless'd creature, and behold  
 These arms the precious innocents enfold.  
 Assist my erring nature to fulfil  
 The sacred trust and ward off every ill;  
 And oh! let *her* who is my dearest care  
 Thy bless'd regard and heavenly influence share.  
 Teach me to form her pure and artless mind  
 Like thine, as true, as innocent, as kind,

That when some future day my hopes shall bless,  
And every voice her virtue shall express,  
When my fond heart delighted hears her praise,  
As with unconscious loveliness she strays,  
Such, let me say, with tears of joy the while,  
Such was the softness of my Mary's smile ;  
Such was *her* youth, so blithe, so rosy-sweet,  
And such *her* mind, unpractised in deceit ;  
With artless eloquence, unstudied grace,  
Thus did she gain in every heart a place.  
Then, while the dear remembrance I behold,  
Time shall steal on, nor tell me I am old,  
Till nature wearied, each fond duty o'er,  
I join my angel friend to part no more !”

There is something extremely sweet and touching in these lines, with their faded elegance, their pretty sentiment, the touch of the rococo in them which has now recovered popular favour, something between poetry and embroidery, and the most tender feminine feeling. All sorts of pretty things were said of this gentle woman in her day. Jackson of Exeter, the musician, who had some professional engagements with her father, and accompanied her often in her songs, said that “to see her, as she stood singing beside him at the pianoforte, was like looking into the face of an angel.” Another still higher authority, the Bishop of Norwich, described her as “the connecting link between woman and angel.” To Wilkes, the coarse and wild yet woman-loving demagogue, she was “the most modest flower he had ever seen.” Sir Joshua painted her as St. Cecilia, and this was the flattering name by which she was known. Her letters, with a good deal of haste, and the faintest note of flippancy in them, are pretty too, full of news and society, and the card-tables at which she lost her money, and the children in whom

her real heart was centred. The romantic girl had grown into a woman, not lofty or great, but sweet and clever, and silly and generous—a fascinating creature. Moore describes, with a comical, high-flown incongruity which reminds us of Mr. Micawber, her various qualities, the intellect which could appreciate the talents of her husband, the feminine sensibility that could passionately feel his success. “Mrs. Sheridan may well take her place beside these Roman wives,” he says; “not only did Calpurnia sympathise with the glory of her husband abroad, but she could also, like Mrs. Sheridan, *add a charm to his talents at home, by setting his verses to music and singing them to her harp.*” Poor Siren! she had her triumphs, but she had her troubles also, many and sore. In Professor Smyth’s little book there is an account of a scene which, though it happened after her death, throws some light upon one side of her troubled existence. Smyth had been engaged as tutor to Tom after his mother’s death, and this was one of the interferences which he had to submit to. Sheridan had been paying a hurried visit to the house at Wanstead in which Tom and his tutor lived:

“It was a severe frost, and had been long, when he came one evening to dine, after his usual manner, on a boiled chicken, at 7, 8, or 9 o’clock, just as it happened, and had hardly drunk his claret, and got the room filled with wax lights, without which he could not exist, when he sent for me; and, lo and behold! the business was that he was miserable on account of Tom’s being on the ice, that he would certainly be drowned, etc., and that he begged it of me as the greatest favour I could do him in some way or other to prevent it. I expostulated with him—that I skated myself—that I had a servant with a rope and ladder at the bank—that the ice would now bear a wagon, etc., etc.; and at last, seeing me grow half angry at his unreasonableness, he acquiesced in what I said, and calling his carriage, as he must be at Drury Lane that night, he said (it was then eleven,

and he was nine miles off), he withdrew. In about half an hour afterwards, as I was going to bed, I heard a violent ringing at the gate; I was wanted; and sure enough what should I see, glaring through the bars, and outshining the lamps of the carriage, but the fine eyes of Sheridan. 'Now, do not laugh at me, Smyth,' he said, 'but I cannot rest or think of anything but this d—d ice and this skating, and you must promise me there shall be no more of it.' I said what may be supposed; and in short was at last obliged to thrust my hand through the bars, which he shook violently, in token that his wishes should be obeyed. 'Never was such a nonsensical person as this father of yours,' said I to Tom. There was no difficulty in coming to a common vote on that point; and so, after spending nearly an hour abusing him, half laughing and half crying, for I was as fond of skating as my pupil could be, lamenting our unhappy fate, we went to bed. We sent up various petitions and remonstrances while the frost lasted, but all in vain. 'Have a glass case constructed for your son at once,' said Mr. Grey to him—an observation which Tom used to quote to me with particular approbation and delight. I talked over the subject of Mr. Sheridan and his idle nervousness with Mrs. Canning, who lived at the end of the village. She told me that nothing could be done—that he would tease and irritate Mrs. Sheridan in this manner till she was ready to dash her head against the wall, being of the same temperament of genius as her husband; that she had seen her burst into tears and leave the room; then the scene changed, and the wall seemed full as likely to receive his head in turn. The folly, however, Mrs. Canning said, was not merely once and away, but was too often repeated; and Mrs. Canning used sometimes, as she told me, to be not a little thankful that she was herself of a more ordinary clay, and that the gods, as in the case of Audrey, had not made her poetical."

This perhaps is the least comprehensible part of Sheridan's character. The combination of this self-tormentor, endowed with a faculty for extracting annoyance and trouble out of every new turn in his circumstances, and persecuting those who were dearest to him by his caprices, with the reckless and careless man of pleasure, is curious, and difficult to realise.

Mrs. Sheridan died in 1792. She had been taken to Bristol, in hopes that the change of air would do her good. But her time had come, and there was no hope for her. Her husband attended her with all the tenderness and anxiety which a man, no doubt remorseful, always impressionable, and ready to be moved by the sight, which was intolerable to him, of suffering, might be supposed to feel, watching over her with the profoundest devotion. "He cannot bear to think her in danger," writes a sympathetic friend, "or that any one else should; though he is as attentive and watchful as if he expected every moment to be her last. It is impossible for any man to behave with greater tenderness or to feel more on such an occasion." He was at her bedside night and day, "and never left her one moment that could be avoided." The crisis was one in which, with his readiness of emotion and quick and sure response to all that touched him, he was sure to appear well. Moore found, among the mass of documents through which he had to pick his way, a scrap of paper evidently belonging to this period, which gives strange expression to that realistic and materialistic horror of death as death, which was one of the features of the time: "The loss of the breath from a beloved object long suffering in pain and certainty to die is not so great a privation as the last loss of her beautiful remains, if they remain so. The victory of the grave is sharper than the sting of death." There is something in this sentiment which makes us shudder. That crowning pang of separation—

"Our lives have fallen so far apart,  
We cannot hear each other speak"—

does not strike this mourner. The contact of the body and decay, the loss of "the beautiful remains," is what

moves him. It is like a child's primitive horror of the black box and the deep hole. In his own dying hour an awe unspeakable stole over his face when he was informed that a clergyman had been sent for. These were things to be held at arm's-length; when he was compulsorily brought in contact with them the terror was almost greater than the anguish.

The Linley family had suffered terribly in these years, one following another to the grave. There is a most touching description of the father given by the actress Mrs. Crouch which goes direct to the heart :

“After Miss Marion Linley died it was melancholy for her to sing to Mr. Linley, whose tears continually fell on the keys as he accompanied her; and if in the course of her profession she was obliged to practise a song which he had been accustomed to hear his lost daughter sing, the similarity of their manner and voices, which he had once remarked with pleasure, then affected him to such a degree that he was frequently forced to quit his instrument and walk about the room to recover his composure.”

After his wife's death Sheridan's life assumed another phase. He had no longer the anchor, such as it was, which steadied him—not even the tug of remorse to bring him home to a house where there was now no one waiting for him. We are indebted to Professor Smyth's narrative for a very graphic description of this portion of Sheridan's life. In the very formation of their connection the peculiarities of his future employer were at once made known to him. It was appointed that he should meet Sheridan at dinner in town, to conclude the arrangement about the tutorship, and to keep this appointment he came up specially from the country. The dinner-hour was seven, but at nine Smyth and the friend who was to introduce him ate their cold meal without Sheridan, who then sent to say



that he had been detained at the House, but would sup with them at midnight at the St. Alban's Tavern, whither they resorted, with precisely the same result. Next day, however, the meeting did take place, and the ruffled soul of the young scholar, who had been extremely indignant to find himself thus treated, was soothed in a few minutes by the engaging manner and delightful speech of his patron. It was at Isleworth, Sheridan's country house, that they met, where very lately Madame de Genlis, that interesting and sentimental refugee, with her lovely daughter, Pamela, the beautiful young creature whom Mrs. Sheridan had bidden Lord Edward Fitzgerald to marry when she died, had paid him a visit. The house was dirty and desolate, the young observer thought, but the master of it the most captivating of men. His brilliant and expressive eyes, a certain modesty in his manner, for which the young Don was not prepared, struck Smyth above all; and he in his turn pleased the nervous and troubled father, who would have kept young Tom in a glass case had he dared. Afterwards another house was taken in Wanstead, in order that Sheridan's baby daughter might be placed under the charge of Mrs. Canning, the lady who had nursed Mrs. Sheridan and loved her, and who lived in this village; and here the boy and his tutor were sent. But a very short time after another blow fell upon Sheridan in the person of this child, whom Professor Smyth describes as the loveliest child he ever saw—an exceptional creature, whom Sheridan made a little goddess of, worshipping her with every baby rite that could be thought of. One night the house had awoke to unwonted merriment; a large childish party filled the rooms, and dancing was going on merrily, when Mrs. Canning suddenly flung open the door, crying out, "The child—the child is dying!"

Sheridan's grief was intense and overwhelming; it was piteous to hear his moans during the terrible night that followed. His warm-hearted, emotional being, horrified and panic-stricken by the approach of death, was once more altogether overwhelmed. The cruel climax of blow after blow crushed him to the earth.

During this time his parliamentary life was going on, with interruptions, sometimes brightening into flashes of his pristine brilliancy. But at this moment there were other troubles, besides those of his home and heart, to make his attendance irregular and withdraw his thoughts from public affairs. How the theatre had been going on all this time it is difficult to make out. We are told of endless embarrassments, difficulties, and trouble, of a treasury emptied wantonly, and actors left without their pay—of pieces which failed, and audiences which diminished. But, on the other hand, we are informed that the prosperity of Drury Lane never was greater than during this period, while the old theatre lasted; and, as it was the only source from which Sheridan drew his income, it is very evident that, notwithstanding all irregularities, broken promises, crowds of duns, and general mismanagement, there was an unfailing fountain of money to be drawn upon. The whole story is confused. We are sometimes told that he was himself the manager, and it is certain that now and then he stooped even so far as to arrange a pantomime; while at the same time we find the theatre under the management of King at one time, of Kemble at another—men much better qualified than Sheridan. The mere fact, indeed, that the Kemble family was at that time on the boards of Drury Lane would seem a sufficient proof of the success of the theatre; but the continually recurring discovery that the proprietor's pressing necessities had

cleared the treasury altogether was little likely to keep the troupe together or inspire its efforts. When any influential member of the company became unmanageable on this score Sheridan's persuasive talent was called in to make all right. Once, we are told, Mrs. Siddons, who had declared that she would not act until her salary was paid, who had resisted successively the eloquent appeals of her colleagues and the despair of the manager, and was calmly sewing at home after the curtain had risen for the piece in which she was expected to perform, yielded helplessly when Sheridan himself, all suave and irresistible, came on the scene, and suffered herself to be driven to the theatre like a lamb. On another occasion it was Kemble that rebelled. We are tempted to quote, for its extremely ludicrous character, this droll little scene. Sheridan had come in accidentally to join the party in the greenroom after the performance, and, taking his seat at the table, made, as usual, a cheerful beginning of conversation. Kemble, however, would make no reply:

“The great actor now looked unutterable things, and occasionally emitted a humming sound like that of a bee, and groaned in spirit inwardly. A considerable time elapsed, and frequent repetitions of the sound, when at length, like a pillar of state, up rose Kemble, and in these words addressed the astonished proprietor: ‘I am an **EAGLE**, whose wings have been bound down by frosts and snows, but now I shake my pinions and cleave into the genial air into which I was born!’ He then deliberately resumed his seat, as if he had relieved himself from unsupportable thralldom.”

Undaunted by this solemn address, Sheridan drew his chair closer, and at the end of the prolonged sitting left the place—not too steadily, it is to be feared—arm-in-arm with the exasperated eagle, whom he had made as mild as any mouse. He did many feats of the same kind.

Once, the bankers having sternly resisted all blandishments of manager, treasurer, all the staff of the theatre, Sheridan went in gaily to the charge, and returned in a few minutes, beaming and successful, with the money they wanted. When he chose nobody could stand against him.

Poor Mr. Smyth had a terrible life of it with this disorderly patron. His letters were neglected, his appointments broken, his salary left unpaid. Once his pupil Tom was sent for in hot haste to meet his father at a certain roadside inn, and there waited for days if not weeks in vain expectation of his errant parent, leaving the unfortunate preceptor a prey to all kinds of anxiety. Another time the long-suffering Smyth was left at Bognor, with an old servant, Martha, without money or occupation, waiting for a summons to London which never came; and, unable at last to live any longer on credit, after letters innumerable of entreaty, protestation, and wrath, went up to London, full of fury, determined to endure no more; but was met by Sheridan with such cordial pleasure, surprise that he had not come sooner, and satisfaction with his appearance now—since Tom was getting into all sorts of mischief—that the angry tutor was entirely vanquished, and remorseful when he thought of the furious letter he had sent to this kind friend. What followed is worth quoting:

“‘I wrote you a letter lately,’ I said; ‘it was an angry one. You will be so good as to think no more of it.’ ‘Oh, certainly not, my dear Smyth,’ he said; ‘I shall never think of what you have said in it, be assured;’ and, putting his hand in his pocket, ‘Here it is,’ he said, offering it to me. I was glad enough to get hold of it; but looking at it as I was about to throw it into the fire, lo and behold, I saw that it had never been opened!’”

Such exasperating yet ludicrous incidents were now commonplaces of Sheridan's life. "Intercourse with him," says Professor Smyth, in a harsher mood, moved by some sting of bitter recollection, "was one eternal insult, mortification, and disappointment." There was a bag on his table into which all letters were stuffed indiscriminately, and in which, when it was turned out, an astonished applicant for debt or favour might see a succession of his own letters as he sent them, with not one seal broken; but, to lessen the mortification, would find also letters enclosing money sent in answer to Sheridan's own urgent applications, turned out in the same condition, having been stuffed with the rest into that hopeless waste heap. When Professor Smyth appealed to Sheridan's old servant to know if nothing could be done to remedy this, Edwards told him a piteous story of how he had found Mr. Sheridan's window, which rattled, wedged up with bank-notes, which the muddled reveller, returning late at night, had stuffed into the gaping sash out of his pocket. The story altogether is laughable and pitiful, a tragic comedy of the most woful fooling. He had no longer youth enough to warrant an easy laugh; his reputation was going from him. He was harassed by endless creditors and duns, not able to stir out of his house without encountering two or three waiting to waylay him. The first of these, if he caught Sheridan at a moment when his pocket had just been replenished, would get the amount of his bill in full, whatever the others might have to say. The stories are endless which deal with these embarrassments, and the shifts and devices of the struggling man were endless also. They are very ridiculous to hear of; but how humiliating, miserable, and sickening to the heart and mind all these repetitions must have been! And then, to make everything worse, the

poor old theatre fell to pieces, and the taste of the day demanded a costly and luxurious new building, according to improved fashions. The money to do this was raised by the manufacture of new shares, in which there was no difficulty—but which naturally restricted the after profits of the original proprietors. And, what was still more serious, the interval occupied in the rebuilding—during which time their profits may be said to have ceased altogether—and the excess of the cost over the estimate, made an enormous difference to men who had no reserve to fall back upon. The company in the meantime played in a small theatre, at great expense, and Sheridan, profuse and lavish, unable to retrench, not wise enough even to attempt retrenchment, got deeper and deeper into debt and embarrassment.

Besides all these misadventures a new and malign influence now got possession of him. He had been presented to the young Prince of Wales, at a time when that illustrious personage was still little more than a boy, and full, it was believed, of promise and hopefulness, and had gradually grown to be one of the most intimate *habitués* of his society, a devoted retainer, adviser, and defender, holding by him in all circumstances, and sharing the irregularities of his life, and the horse-play of his amusements. The *Octogenarian*, from whose rather foolish book we have occasionally quoted, gives a tissue of absurd stories, professedly heard from Sheridan's own lips, in which the adventures of a night are recorded, and the heir-apparent is represented to us, in company with two statesmen, as all but locked up for the night at a police-station. Whether this was true or not, it is certain that the glamour which there is in the rank of a royal personage, that dazzlement which so few can resist, fell upon Sheridan. His action

as the adviser and representative in Parliament of this unillustrious Prince was dignified and sensible; but the orgies of Carlton House were, unfortunately, too much in Sheridan's way to be restrained or discountenanced by him, and so much hope and possibility as remained in his life were lost in the vulgar dissipations of this depraved secondary court, and in the poor vanity of becoming boon companion and buffoon to that first gentleman in Europe, whose florid and padded comeliness was the admiration of his day. It was a poor end for the great dramatist, who has kept thousands of his countryfolk in genial, not uninnocent amusement for the last century, and for the great orator whose eloquence had disturbed the judgment of the most august of legislative assemblies, and shaken even the convictions of the hottest partisans; but it was an end to which he had been for some time tending, and which, perhaps, the loss of his wife had made one way or other inevitable.

In the mean time several events occurred which may fill up this division of the life of the man, as apart from that of the politician and orator. In 1794 the new theatre was finished, and Sheridan sketched out for the opening a sort of extravaganza called *The Glorious First of June*, which was apparently in celebration of the naval victory of Lord Howe. The dialogue was not his, but merely the construction and arrangement, and, in emulation of Tilbury and the feats of Mr. Puff, a grand sea-fight, with finale of a lovers' meeting to the triumphant sounds of "Rule, Britannia," was introduced. The two pasteboard fleets rehearsed their manœuvres under the eye of the Duke of Clarence, and it is to be supposed that the spectacle had a triumphant success. A year or two later a less agreeable incident occurred in the history of Drury Lane. Either

deceived by the many who were ready to stake their credit upon the authenticity of the Ireland forgeries—then given forth as a discovery of precious relics of Shakspeare, including among them a completed and unpublished play—or deceived in his own person on the subject, one on which he was not learned, Sheridan accepted for the theatre this play, called *Vortigern*, and produced it with much pomp and magnificence. The audience was a crowded and critical one; and the public mind was so strongly roused by the question that, no doubt, there was some factious feeling in the prompt and unmistakable rejection of the false Shakspeare, to which Kemble by his careless acting is said to have contributed. He had never believed in the discovery, and might be irritated that the decision had been made without consulting him. Dr. Parr, however, for whom Sheridan had a great respect, and with whom he kept up friendly relations all his life, was one of those who had headed the blunder, receiving the forgeries reverentially as pure Shakspeare; and it was natural enough that Sheridan's judgment should have been influenced by a man whom he must have felt a much better authority on the question than himself. For he was no student of Shakspeare, and his prevailing recklessness was more than enough to counterbalance the keen critical instinct which produced *The Critic*. In all likelihood he never investigated the question at all, but calculated on a temporary theatrical success, without other results. "Sheridan was never known to offer his opinion on the matter until after its representation on the stage: he left the public to decide on its merits," says one of his biographers; but the incident is not an agreeable one.

It was less his fault than that of his public, perhaps, that the stage, shortly after recovering from the salutary



influence of *The Critic*, dropped again into bathos and the false heroic. "Kotzebue and German sausages are the order of the day," Sheridan himself is reported to have said when, with a shrug of his shoulders, he produced the *Stranger*, that culmination of the sentimental commonplace. Everybody will remember Thackeray's delightful banter of this wonderful production, which has, however, situations so skilfully prepared and opportunities so great for a clever actress, that it has continued to find a place in the repertory of most theatres, and is still to be heard of as the show-piece of a wandering company, as well as now and then on the most ambitious boards, its dubious moral and un-English *dénouement* notwithstanding. With Mrs. Siddons as Mrs. Haller, it may be imagined that the real pathos involved in the story would have full expression.

The success of the *Stranger* impelled Sheridan to another adaptation of a similar kind, in the tragedy of *Pizarro*, which he altered and decorated so much, it is said, as to make it almost his own. The bombast and clap-trap of this production make us regret to associate it with his name; but here also the dramatic construction was good enough, and the situations so striking as to rivet the attention of the audience, while the high-flown magnificence of the sentiments was such as always delights the multitude. When something was said to Pitt, between whom and Sheridan a gradually increasing enmity had grown, about the new drama, the Minister answered, "If you mean what Sheridan wrote, there is nothing new in it. I have heard it all long ago in his speeches on Hastings's trial." It is undeniable that there is a good deal of truth in this, and that Rolla's grand patriotic tirade—which used to be in all school reading-books, as a lesson in elocution—bears a

strong resemblance to many passages in Sheridan's speeches. All this helped its popularity. Grand addresses in favour of patriotism are always delightful to the galleries, and have at all times a charm for the general imagination; but in those days, when there was actual fighting going on, and France, who had constituted herself the pedagogue of the world, to teach the nations the alphabet of freedom, was supposed to threaten and endanger England with her fiery teaching, it may be supposed to what a height of enthusiasm these exhortations would raise the audience. "They follow an adventurer whom they fear, and obey a power which they hate; we revere a monarch whom we love, a God whom we adore. They boast they come but to improve our state, enlarge our thoughts, and free us from the yoke of error! Yes! they will give enlightened freedom to our minds, who are themselves the slaves of passion, avarice, and pride!" Whether it were under Robespierre or Bonaparte, the common people in England scorned and feared the heated neighbour-nation, which thought itself entitled to dictate to the world; and no doubt the popular mind made a rapid adaptation of these heroic phrases.

It had been hard to move the author to complete *The Critic*; and the reader will remember the trick of Linley and his coadjutors in those early days when the delays and evasions of the gay young man were an excellent jest, and their certainty of being able to put all right when they could lock him in with his work had something triumphant in it. But all that was over now; old Linley was dead, and a new generation, who had no worship for Sheridan, and a very clear apprehension of the everlasting confusion produced by his disorderly ways, had taken the place of the light-hearted actors of old. But

notwithstanding the awe-inspiring presence of Mrs. Siddons, and the importance of her brother, the astounding fact that when the curtain fell upon the fourth act of *Pizarro* these theatrical potentates had not yet seen their parts for the fifth, which they had to study in the interval, is vouched for by various witnesses. It is hard to imagine the state of the actors' minds, the terrible anxiety of the manager, in such an extraordinary dilemma, and still more hard to realise the hopeless confusion in the mind of the man who knew all that was being risked by such a piece of folly, and yet could not nerve himself to the work till the last moment. He was drifting on the rapids by this time, and going headlong to ruin, heedless of everything, name and fame, credit and fortune, the good opinion of his friends, the support of the public, all except the indulgence of the whim of the moment, or of the habit which was leading him to destruction.

He took another step about the same time which might perhaps have redeemed him had it been more wisely set about. He had met one evening, so the story goes, among other more important, and let us hope more well-bred people, a foolish, pretty girl, who, either out of flippant dislike to his looks, or that very transparent *agacerie* by which foolish men are sometimes attracted in the lower ranks of life, regarded him with exclamations of "Fright! horrid creature!" and the like, something in the style, not of *Evelina*, but of Miss Burney's vulgar personages. He was by this time forty-four, but ready enough still to take up any such challenge, and either he was piqued into making so frank a critic change her opinions, or the prettiness and foolishness of the girl amused and pleased him. He set to work at once to make her aware that a man of middle-age and unhandsome aspect may yet outdo the youngest

and most attractive, and no very great time elapsed before he was completely successful. The lady's father was little pleased with the match. He was a clergyman, the Dean of Winchester, and might well have been indisposed to give his daughter and her five thousand pounds to a man with such a reputation. He made his consent conditional on the settling of fifteen thousand pounds, in addition to her own little fortune, upon her. Sheridan had always been great in financial surprises, and, to the astonishment of the dean, the fifteen thousand was soon forthcoming. He got it this time by new shares of the theatre, thus diminishing his receipts always a little and a little more. A small estate, Polesden, in Surrey, was bought with the money, and for a time all was gaiety and pleasure. It was in order to tell him of this marriage that Sheridan sent for his son, from his tutor and his lessons, on the occasion already referred to, to meet him at Guildford, at an inn of which he had forgotten the name. Four or five days after the anxious tutor received a letter from Tom. "My father I have never seen," wrote the lad, "and all that I can hear of him is that instead of dining with me on Wednesday last, he passed through Guildford on his way to town, with four horses and lamps, about twelve." Like father like son, the youth had remained there, though with only a few shillings in his pockets; but at the end was so "bored and wearied out" that he would have been glad to return even to his books. Finally, he was sent for to London and informed of the mystery. His letter to Smyth disclosing this is so characteristic that it is worth quoting:

"It is not I that am to be married, nor you. Set your heart at rest: it is my father himself; the lady a Miss Ogle, who lives at Winchester; and that is the history of the Guildford business.

About my own age—better me to marry her, you will say. I am not of that opinion. My father talked to me two hours last night, and made out to me that it was the most sensible thing he could do. Was not this very clever of him? Well, my dear Mr. S., you should have been tutor to him, you see. I am incomparably the most rational of the two.”

Moore describes the immediate result of the new marriage as a renewal of Sheridan's youth. “It is said by those who were in habits of intimacy with him at this period that they had seldom seen his spirits in a state of more buoyant vivacity,” and there was perhaps a possibility that the new event might have proved a turning-point. It is unfair to blame the foolish girl, who had no idea what the dangers were which she had so rashly undertaken to deal with, that she did not reclaim or deliver Sheridan. To do this was beyond her power, as it was beyond his own.

## CHAPTER VI.

### DECADENCE.

SHERIDAN's parliamentary career was long, and he took an important part in much of the business of the country ; but he never again struck the same high note as that with which he electrified the House on the question of the impeachment of Warren Hastings. His speech in answer to Lord Mornington's denunciation of the Revolution in France, perhaps his next most important effort, was eloquent and striking, but it had not the glow and glitter of the great oration under which the Commons of England held their breath. The French Revolution by this time had ceased to be the popular and splendid outburst of freedom which it had at first appeared. Opinions were now violently divided. The recent atrocities in France had scared England ; and all the moving subjects which had inspired Sheridan before, the pictures of innocence outraged and the defenceless slaughtered, were now in the hands of his political opponents. He selected skilfully, however, the points which he could most effectively turn against them, and seizing upon Lord Mornington's description of the sacrifices by which French patriotism was compelled to prove itself, the compulsory loans and services, the privations and poverty amid which the leaders of the Revolution were struggling, drew an effective picture of

the very different state of affairs in England, which throws a curious light upon the political condition of the time. Sheridan's party had suffered many losses and defections. A peer in those days or a wealthy landed gentleman had need to be enlightened and strong-minded indeed, if not almost fanatical in opinion, to continue cordially on the side of those who were confiscating and murdering his equals on the other side of the Channel, and who had made the very order to which he belonged an offence against the state. The Whig nobility were no more stoical or heroic than other men, and the publication of Burke's *Reflections* and his impassioned testimony against the uncontrollable tendencies of the Revolution had moved them profoundly even before the course of events proved his prophecies true. To make the conversion of these important adherents more easy, Pitt, on the other hand, held out his arms to them, and, as the fashion of the time was, posts and sinecures of all kinds rained upon the new converts. Sheridan, with instinctive perception of the mode of attack which suited his powers best, seized upon this with something of the same fervour as that with which, though in no way particularly interested in India, he had seized upon the story of the injured Begums and cruel English conquerors in the East. It was altogether the other side of the argument, yet the inspiration of the orator was the same. It was now the despoilers who were his clients; but their work of destruction had not been to their own profit. They were sufferers, not gainers. No rich posts nor hidden treasures were reserved by them for themselves, and the contrast between the advantages reaped by so many Englishmen arrayed against them, and the sacrifices and privations of the French patriots, was perfect. Sheridan took up the subject with all the greater

wealth and energy of indignant conviction that he himself had never reaped any substantial advantage from the occasional elevation of his own party. He had carried no spoils with him out of office; he had not made hay while the sun shone. If anybody had a right to be called a disinterested politician he had, in this sense at least. His interest in the subjects which he treated might be more a party interest than any real devotion to the cause of freedom and humanity; but his hands were clean from bribe or pecuniary inducement; and his fervour, if perhaps churned up a little by party motives, was never ungenerous. The indignant bitterness with which he and the small party who adhered to Fox regarded the desertion of so many of their supporters gave force to the reply with which he met Lord Mornington's unlucky description of the French efforts. On no other point could the comparison have been so completely in favour of the revolutionary. Sheridan takes the account of their privations triumphantly out of the hand of the narrator. Far different indeed, he cries scornfully, is the position of the rival statesmen and officials in England. He can imagine the address made to them "by our prudent Minister" in words like the following—words which burn and sting with all the fire of satire:

"Do I demand of you wealthy citizens [it is Pitt who is supposed to be the speaker] to lend your hoards to Government without interest? On the contrary, when I shall come to propose a loan, there is not a man of you to whom I shall not hold out at least a job in every part of the subscription, and a usurious profit upon every pound you devote to the necessities of your country. Do I demand of you, my fellow-placemen and brother-pensioners, that you should sacrifice any part of your stipends to the public exigency? On the contrary, am I not daily insuring your emoluments, and your numbers in proportion as the country becomes unable to provide for you?



Do I require of you, my latest and most zealous proselytes—of you who have come over to me for the special purpose of supporting the war, a war on the success of which you solemnly protest that the salvation of Britain and of civil society itself depends—do I require of you that you should make a temporary sacrifice in the cause of human nature of the greater part of your private incomes? No, gentlemen, I scorn to take advantage of the eagerness of your zeal; and to prove that I think the sincerity of your attachment to me needs no such test, I will make your interest co-operate with your principle; I will quarter many of you on the public supply, instead of calling on you to contribute to it, and while their whole thoughts are absorbed in patriotic apprehensions for their country, I will dexterously force upon others the favorite objects of the vanity or ambition of their lives.”

Then the orator turns to give his own judgment of the state of affairs. “Good God, sir!” he cries, “that he should have thought it prudent to have forced this contrast upon our attention!” and he hurries on with indignant eloquence to describe the representations made of “the unprecedented peril of the country,” the constitution in danger, the necessity of “maintaining the war by every possible sacrifice,” and that the people should not murmur at their burdens, seeing that their all was at stake :

“The time is come when all honest and disinterested men should rally round the throne as round a standard—for what? Ye honest and disinterested men, to receive, for your own private emolument, a portion of those very taxes which they themselves wring from the people on the pretence of saving them from the poverty and distress which you say the enemy would inflict, but which you take care no enemy shall be able to aggravate. Oh, shame! shame! is this a time for selfish intrigues, and the little dirty traffic for lucre and emolument? Does it suit the honour of a gentleman to ask at such a moment? Does it become the honesty of a minister to grant? Is it intended to confirm the pernicious doctrine, so industriously propagated by many, that all public men are impostors, and that every

politician has his price? Or even where there is no principle in the bosom, why does not prudence hint to the mercenary and the vain to abstain a while at least, and wait the fitting of the times? Improvident impatience! Nay, even from those who seem to have no direct object of office or profit, what is the language which the actors speak? The throne is in danger! we will support the throne; but let us share the smiles of royalty. The order of nobility is in danger! 'I will fight for nobility,' says the viscount, 'but my zeal would be much greater if I were made an earl.' 'Rouse all the marquis within me,' exclaims the earl, 'and the peerage never turned forth a more undaunted champion in its cause than I shall prove.' 'Stain my green ribbon blue,' cries out the illustrious knight, 'and the fountain of honour will have a fast and faithful servant.'

This scathing blast of satire must, one would think, have overwhelmed the Whig deserters, the new placemen and sinecurists, though it could not touch the impassioned soul of such a prophet as Burke, whose denunciations and anticipations had been so terribly verified. The reader already acquainted with the life of Burke will remember how, early in the controversy, before France had stained her first triumphs, Sheridan lost, on account of his continued faith in the Revolution, the friendship of his great countryman, whose fiery temper was unable to brook so great a divergence of opinion, and who cut him sternly off, as he afterwards did a more congenial and devoted friend, Fox, by whom the breach was acknowledged with tears in a scene as moving as ever was enacted in the House of Commons. Sheridan did not feel it so deeply, the link between them being lighter, and the position of involuntary rivalry almost inevitable. And though it cannot be believed that his convictions on the subject were half so profound, or his judgment so trustworthy, his was the more difficult side of opinion, and his fidelity to the cause, which, politically and, we may

even say, conventionally, was that of freedom, was unwavering. The speech from which we have quoted could not, from its nature, be so carefully premeditated and prepared as Sheridan's great efforts had heretofore been; but it had the advantage of being corrected for the press, and has consequently reached us in a fuller and more complete form than any other of Sheridan's speeches. Professor Smyth gives a graphic account of his sudden appearance at Wanstead along with the editor of the paper in which it had been reported, and of the laborious diligence with which he devoted himself to its revision, during several days of unbroken work. But we should scarcely have known our Sheridan had not this spasmodic effort been balanced by an instance of characteristic indolence and carelessness. Lord Mornington in his speech had made much reference to a French pamphlet by Brissot, a translation of which had been republished in London, with a preface by Burke, and largely circulated. Smyth remarked that Sheridan accepted Lord M.'s view of this pamphlet, and his quotations from it. "How could I do otherwise?" he said. "I never read a word of it." Perhaps it was not necessary. The careful combination of facts and details was not in Sheridan's way; but in his hap-hazard daring a certain instinct guided him, and he seized unerringly the thing he could do, the point of the position, picturesque and personal, which his faculty could best assail.

A far less satisfactory chapter in his life was that already referred to, which linked Sheridan's fortunes with those of the Prince Regent, and made him, for a long time, almost the representative in Parliament of that royal personage. When the first illness of the King, in 1789, made it likely that power must come one way or other

into the hands of the heir-apparent, there was much excitement, as was natural, among the party with which the name of the Prince of Wales was connected, and who, as appeared, had everything to hope from his accession, actual or virtual. It is scarcely necessary to our purpose to trace the stormy party discussions on the subject of the Regency, between the extreme claim put forth by Fox of the right of the Prince to be immediately invested with all the powers of royalty, as his father's natural deputy and representative, and the equally extreme counter-statement of Pitt, dictated by alarm, as the other was by hope, that "the Prince of Wales had no more right to exercise the powers of government than any other person in the realm." Sheridan's share in the debate was chiefly signalled by his threat, as injudicious as the original assertion of his leader, that "the Prince might be provoked to make the claim which the other party opposed so strenuously;" "but his most important agency," says Moore, "lay in the less public business connected with" the question. He was in high favour at Carlton House, and the chosen adviser of the Prince; and although Moore's researches enabled him to prove that the most important document in the whole episode—the Prince's letter to Pitt—was the production, not of Sheridan, but of the master-spirit, Burke, Sheridan's pen was employed in various papers of importance; and though the post allotted to him in the shortlived new ministry was no more than that of Treasurer of the Navy, a position not at all adequate to his apparent importance, he was in reality a very active agent behind the scenes. The King's speedy recovery, however, at this moment was fatal to Sheridan's fortunes, and all that came of this momentary gleam of advancement to his family was that Charles Sheridan, in Ireland, whose post had been the only gain

of his brother's former taste of power, lost it in consequence of the new re-revolution of affairs, though he carried with him a pension of £1200 a year—probably a very good substitute. He was the only one profited in pocket by Sheridan's political elevation and fame. Once more, in 1806, after the death of Pitt, Sheridan followed Fox into office in the same unimportant post of Treasurer to the Navy. But Fortune was not on his side, and Fox's death in a few months withdrew him for ever from all the chances of power.

It seems inconceivable, though true, that the two great orators of the period, the men whose figures stand prominent in every discussion, and one of whom at least had so large and profound an influence on his time, should, when their party rose to the head of affairs, have been so unceremoniously disposed of. Sheridan's insignificant post might be accounted for by his known incapacity for continued exertion; but to read the name of Burke as Paymaster of the Forces fills the reader with amazement. They were both self-made, without family or connections to found a claim upon, but the eminence, especially of the latter, was incontestable. Both were of the highest importance to their party, and Sheridan was in the enjoyment of that favour of the Prince which told for so much in those days. And yet this was the best that their claims could secure. It is a somewhat humiliating proof of how little great mental gifts, reaching the height of genius in one case, can do for their possessor. Both Burke and Sheridan are favourite instances of the reverse opinion. It is a commonplace to quote them as examples of the manner in which a man of genius may raise himself to the highest elevation. And yet, after they had dazzled England for years, one of them the highest originating

soul, the profoundest thinker of his class, the other an unrivalled instrument at least in the hand of a great party leader, this was all they could attain to—Edmund Burke, Paymaster of the Forces; Brinsley Sheridan, Treasurer of the Navy. It is a curious commentary upon the unbounded applause and reputation which these two men enjoyed in their day, and the place they have taken permanently in the history of their generation.

Sheridan's connection with the Prince lasted for many years. He appears to have been not only one of his favourite companions, but for some time at least his most confidential adviser. When the Prince on his marriage put forth a second demand for the payment of his debts, after the distinct promise made on the first occasion that no such claim should be made again, it was Sheridan who was the apologist, if apology his explanation can be called. He informed the House that he had advised the Prince to make no such pledge, but that it was inserted without the knowledge of either, and at a moment when it was impossible to withdraw from it. He added that he himself had drawn up a scheme of retrenchment which would have made such an application unnecessary, that he had put a stop to a loan proposed to be raised for the Prince in France, as unconstitutional, and that he had systematically counselled an abstinence from all meddling in great political questions. Moore characterises this explanation as marked by "a communicativeness that seemed hardly prudent," and it is difficult to suppose that Sheridan's royal patron could have liked it; but he did not disown it in any way, and retained the speaker in his closest confidence for many years, during which Sheridan's time and pen and ready eloquence were always at his master's service. There is a strange mixture throughout his history

of serviceableness and capacity for work, with an almost incredible carelessness and indolence, of which his behaviour at this period affords a curious example. He would seem to have spared no trouble in the Prince's service, to have been ready at his call at all times and seasons, conducting the most important negotiations for him, and acting as the means of communication between him and the leaders of his party. Perhaps pride and a gratified sense of knowing the mind of the heir-apparent better than any one else, may have supplied the place of true energy and diligence for the moment; and certainly he was zealous and busy in his patron's affairs, disorderly and indifferent as he was in his own. And though his power and influence were daily decreasing in Parliament, his attendance becoming more and more irregular, and his interest in public business capricious and fitful, yet there were still occasions on which Sheridan came to the front with an energy and spirit worthy of his best days. One of these was at the time of the great mutiny at the Nore, when the ministry was embarrassed on all hands, the Opposition violently factious, and every appearance alarming. Sheridan threw himself into the midst of the excitement with a bold and generous support of the Government, which strengthened their hands in the emergency and did much to restore tranquillity and confidence. "The patriotic promptitude of his interference," says Moore, "was even more striking than it appears in the record of his parliamentary labours." By this time Fox had withdrawn from the House, and no other of the Whig leaders showed anything of Sheridan's energy and public spirit. At a still later period, in the course of a discussion on the army estimates, he was complimented by Canning as "a man who had often come forward in times of public em-

barrassment as the champion of the country's rights and interests, and had rallied the hearts and spirits of the nation." The warmest admirer of Sheridan might be content to let such words as these stand as the conclusion of his parliamentary career.

Thus his life was checkered with bursts of recovery, with rapid and unexpected manifestations of power. Now and then he would rise to the height of a crisis, and by moments display a faculty prompt and eager and practical. Sometimes, on a special occasion, he would work hard, "till the motes were in his eyes." There must have been in him some germ of financial genius which enabled him without any capital to acquire great property, and conduct what was in reality a large commercial speculation in his theatre with success for many years. All these qualities are strangely at variance with the background of heedlessness, indolence, and reckless self-indulgence which take both credit and purpose out of his life. He is like two men, one of them painfully building up what the other every day delights to pull down. His existence from the time of his wife's death seems, when we look back upon it, like a headlong rush to destruction; and yet even in the last chapter of his career there were times when he would turn and stand and present a manful front to fate. Though there is no appearance in anything he says or does of very high political principles, yet he held steadfastly by the cause of reform, and for the freedom of the subject, and against all encroachments of power, as long as he lived. He was on the side of Ireland in the troubles then as always existing, though of a changed complexion from those we are familiar with now. He would not allow himself to be persuaded out of his faith in the new principle of freedom in France, either by the



excesses which disgraced it, or by the potent arguments of his friend and countryman. And he was disinterested and faithful in his party relations, giving up office almost unnecessarily when he considered that his political allegiance required it, and holding fast to his leader even when there was estrangement between them. All these particulars should be remembered to Sheridan's credit. He got nothing for his political services, at a time when sinecures were common, and, with one exception, kept his political honour stainless, and never departed from his standard.

He served the Prince in the same spirit of disinterestedness—a disinterestedness so excessive that it looks like recklessness and ostentatious indifference to ordinary motives. That gratification in the confidence of royalty, which in all ages has moved men to sacrifices and labours not undertaken willingly in any other cause, seems a poor sort of inspiration when Royal George was the object of it; but in this case it was like master like man, and the boon companion whose wit enlivened the royal orgies was not likely perhaps to judge his Prince by any high ideal. He had never received from his royal friend “so much as the present of a horse or a picture,” until in the year 1804 the appointment of Receiver of the Duchy of Cornwall was conferred upon him, an appointment which he announces to the then Minister, Mr. Addington, with lively satisfaction and gratitude:

“It has been my pride and pleasure,” he says, “to have exerted my humble efforts to serve the Prince without ever accepting the slightest obligation from him; but in the present case and under the present circumstances I think it would have been really false pride and apparently mischievous affectation to have declined this mark of his Royal Highness's confidence and favour.”

It was no great return for so many services; and even this was not at first a satisfactory gift, since it had been previously bestowed (hypothetically) on some one else, and a long correspondence and many representations and explanations seem to have been exchanged before Sheridan was secure in his post—the only profit he carried with him out of his prolonged and brilliant political life.

The one instance, which has been referred to, in which his political loyalty was defective occurred very near the end of his career. Fox was dead, to whom, though some misunderstanding had clouded their later intercourse, he had always been faithful, and other leaders had succeeded in the conduct of the party, leaders with whom Sheridan had less friendship and sympathy, and who had thwarted him in his wish to succeed Fox as the representative of Westminster, an honour on which he had set his heart. It was in favour of a young nobleman of no account in the political world that the man who had so long been an ornament to the party, and had in his day done it such manful service, was put aside; and Sheridan would have been more than mortal had he not felt it deeply. The opportunity of avenging himself occurred before long. When the Prince, his patron, finally came to the position of Regent, under many restrictions, and with an almost harsh insistence upon the fact that he held the office not by right, but by the will of Parliament, Sheridan had one moment of triumph—a triumph almost whimsical in its completeness. In the ordinary course of affairs it became the duty of the Lords Grey and Granville, the recognised leaders of the Whig party, which up to this time had been the party specially attached to the Prince, to prepare his reply to the address presented to him by the Houses of

Parliament; but the document, when submitted to him, was not to the royal taste. Sheridan, in the meanwhile, who knew all the thoughts of his patron and how to please him, had prepared privately, almost accidentally, according to his own account, a draft of another reply, which the Prince adopted instead, to the astonishment and indignant dismay of the official leaders, who could scarcely believe in the possibility of such an interference. Moore enters into a lengthened explanation of Sheridan's motives and conduct, supported by his own letters and statements, of which there are so many that it is very apparent he was himself conscious of much necessity for explanation. The great Whig Lords, who thus found themselves superseded, made an indignant remonstrance; but the mischief was done. In the point of view of party allegiance the proceeding was indefensible; and yet we cannot but think the reader will feel a certain sympathy with Sheridan in this sudden turning of the tables upon the men who had slighted him and ignored his claims. They were new men, less experienced than himself, and the dangerous gratification of showing that, in spite of all they might do, he had still the power to forestall and defeat them, must have been a very strong temptation. But such gratifications are of a fatal kind. Sheridan himself, even at the moment of enjoying it, must have been aware of the perilous step he was taking. And it is another proof of the curious mixture of capacity for business and labour which existed in him along with the most reckless indolence and forgetfulness, that the literature of this incident is so abundant; and that, what with drafts prepared for the Prince's consideration, and letters and documents of state corrected for his adoption, and all the explanatory addresses on his own account which Sheridan thought necessary, he was as

fully employed at this crisis as if he had been a Secretary of State.

This or anything like it he was not, however, fated to be. A humbler appointment, that of Chief Secretary, under the Lord-lieutenant of Ireland, had been designed for him had the Whig party, as they anticipated, come into office; although, after the mortification to which Sheridan had subjected his noble chiefs, even such an expedient of getting honourably rid of him might have been more than their magnanimity was equal to. But these expectations faded as soon as the Regent was firmly established in his place. The Prince, as is well known, pursued the course common to heirs on their accession, and flung over the party of Opposition to which he had previously attached himself. The Whigs were left in the lurch, and their political opponents continued in power. That Sheridan had a considerable share in bringing this about seems evident; but in punishing them he punished also himself. If he could not serve under them, it was evidently impossible that under the other party he could with any regard to his own honour serve. There is an account in the anonymous biography to which reference has been made of an attempt on the part of the Prince to induce Sheridan to follow himself in his change of politics; but this has an apocryphal aspect, as the report of a private conversation between two persons, neither very likely to repeat it, always has. It is added that, after Sheridan's refusal, he saw no more of his royal patron. Anyhow it would seem that the intercourse between them failed after this point. The brilliant instrument had done its service, and was no longer wanted. To please his Prince, and perhaps to avenge himself, he had broken his allegiance to his party, and henceforward neither they whom he had thus deserted, nor he for whom he had

deserted them, had any place or occasion for him. He continued to appear fitfully in his place in Parliament for some time after, and one of his latest speeches gives expression to his views on the subject of Catholic Emancipation. Sheridan's nationality could be little more than nominal, yet his interest in Irish affairs had always been great, and he had invariably supported the cause of that troubled country in all emergencies. In this speech, which was one of the last expressions of his opinions on an Irish subject, he maintains that the good treatment of the Catholics was "essential to the safety of this empire":

"I will never give my vote to any Administration that opposes the question of Catholic Emancipation. I will not consent to receive a furlough upon that particular question, even though a ministry were carrying every other I wished. In fine, I think the situation of Ireland a permanent consideration. If they were to be the last words I should ever utter in this House I should say, 'Be just to Ireland as you value your own honour; be just to Ireland as you value your own peace.'"

In this point at least he showed true discernment, and was no false prophet.

The last stroke of evil fortune had, however, fallen upon Sheridan several years before the conclusion of his parliamentary life, putting what was in reality the finishing touch to his many and long-continued embarrassments. One evening in the early spring of the year 1809 a sudden blaze illuminated the House of Commons in the midst of a debate, lighting up the assembly with so fiery and wild a light that the discussion was interrupted in alarm. Sheridan was present in his place, and when the intimation was made that the blaze came from Drury Lane, and that his new theatre, so lately opened, and still scarcely completed, was the fuel which fed this fire, it must have

been a pale countenance indeed upon which that fiery illumination shone; but he had never failed in courage, and this time the thrill of desperation must have moved the man whose ruin was thus accomplished. When some scared member, perhaps with a tender thought for the orator who had once in that place stood so high, proposed the adjournment of the House, Sheridan, with the proud calm which such a highly-strained nature is capable of in great emergencies, was the first to oppose the impulse. "Whatever might be the extent of the calamity," he said, "he hoped it would not interfere with the public business of the country." He left his brother members to debate the war in Spain, while he went forth to witness a catastrophe which made the further conduct of any struggle in his own person an impossibility. Some time later he was found seated in one of the coffee-houses in Covent Garden, "swallowing port by the tumblerful," as one witness says. One of the actors, who had been looking on at the scene of destruction, made an indignant and astonished outcry at sight of him, when Sheridan, looking up, with the wild gaiety of despair and that melancholy humour which so often lights up a brave man's ruin, replied, "Surely a man may be allowed to take a glass of wine by his own fire-side." The blaze which shone upon these melancholy potations consumed everything he had to look to in the world. He was still full of power to enjoy, a man not old in years, and of the temperament which never grows old; but he must have seen everything that made life possible flying from him in those thick-coiling wreaths of smoke. There was still his parliamentary life and his Prince's favour to fall back upon, but probably in that dark hour his better judgment showed him that everything was lost.

After the moment of disaster, however, Sheridan's buoyant nature and that keen speculative faculty which would seem to have been so strong in him, awoke with all the fervour of the rebound from despair, as he began to see a new hope. In a letter addressed to Mr. Whitbread, written soon after the fire, and with the high compliment that he considered Whitbread "the man living in my estimation the most disposed and the most competent to bestow a portion of your time and ability to assist the call of friendship," he thus appeals to his kindness :

"You said some time since, in my house, but in a careless conversation only, that you would be a member of a committee for rebuilding Drury Lane Theatre, if it would serve me; and indeed you very kindly suggested yourself that there were more persons to assist that object than I was aware of. I most thankfully accept the offer of your interference, and am convinced of the benefits your friendly exertions are competent to produce. I have worked the whole subject in my own mind, and see a clear way to retrieve a great property, at least to my son and his family, if my plan meets the support I hope it will appear to merit.

"Writing this to you in the sincerity of private friendship and the reliance I place on my opinion of your character, I need not ask of you, though eager and active in politics as you are, not to be severe in criticising my palpable neglect of all parliamentary duty. It would not be easy to explain to you, or even to make you comprehend, or any one in prosperous and affluent plight, the private difficulties I have to struggle with. My mind and the resolute independence belonging to it has not been in the least subdued by the late calamity; but the consequences arising from it have more engaged and embarrassed me than perhaps I have been willing to allow. It has been a principle of my life, persevered in through great difficulties, never to borrow money of a private friend; and this resolution I would starve rather than violate. When I ask you to take part in this settlement of my shattered affairs I ask you only to do so after a previous investigation of every part of the past circumstances which relate to the truth. I wish you to accept, in conjunction with those

who wish to serve me, and to whom I think you would not object. I may be again seized with an illness as alarming as that I lately experienced. Assist me in relieving my mind from the greatest affliction that such a situation can again produce—the fear of others suffering by my death.”

Sheridan's proposal was, that the theatre should be rebuilt by subscription by a committee under the chairmanship of Whitbread, he himself and his son receiving from them an equivalent in money for their share of the property under the patent. This was done accordingly. Sheridan's share amounted to £24,000, while his son got the half of that sum. But the money which was to take the place of the income which Sheridan had so long drawn from the theatre was, it is needless to say, utterly inadequate, and was ingulfed almost immediately by payments. Indeed, the force of circumstances and his necessities compelled him to use it, as he might have used a sum independent of his regular income which had fallen into his hand. Whitbread was not to be dealt with now as had been the world in general in Sheridan's brighter days. “He was, perhaps,” says Moore, “the only person whom Sheridan had ever found proof against his powers of persuasion;” and as in the long labyrinth of engagements which Sheridan no more expected to be held closely to than he would himself have held to a bargain, he had undertaken to wait for his money until the theatre was rebuilt, there were endless controversies and struggles over every demand he made: and they were many. Sheridan had pledged himself also to non-interference, to “have no concern or connection of any kind whatever with the new undertaking,” with as little idea of being held to the pledge; and when his criticisms upon the plans, and attempts to alter them, were repulsed, and the promises he



had made recalled to his memory, his indignation knew no bounds. "There cannot exist in England," he cries, "an individual so presumptuous or so void of common-sense as not sincerely to solicit the aid of my practical experience on this occasion, even were I not in justice to the subscribers bound to offer it." In short, it is evident that he never had faced the position at all, but expected to remain to some extent at the head of affairs as of old, and with an inexhaustible treasury to draw upon, although he had formally renounced all claim upon either. When he wrote indignantly to Whitbread as to an advance of £2000 which had been refused to him, and of which he declared that "this and this alone lost me my election" (to Stafford, whither he had returned after his failure at Westminster), Whitbread replied in a letter which paints the condition of the unfortunate man beset by creditors with the most pitiful distinctness:

"You will recollect the £5000 pledged to Peter Moore to answer demands; the certificates given to Giblet, Ker, Iremonger, Cross, and Hirdle, five each at your request; the engagements given to Ettes and myself, and the arrears to the Linley family. All this taken into consideration will leave a large balance still payable to you. Still there are upon that balance the claims upon you of Shaw, Taylor, and Grubb, for all of which you have offered to leave the whole of your compensation in my hand to abide the issue of arbitration."

Poor Sheridan! he had meant to eat his cake yet have it, as is so common. In his wonderful life of shifts and chances he had managed to do so again and again. But the moment had come when it was no more practicable, and neither persuasion nor threats nor indignation could move the stern man of business to whom he had so lately appealed as the man of all others most likely to help and succour. He was so deeply wounded by the management

of the new building and all its arrangements that he would not permit his wife to accept the box which had been offered for her use by the committee, and it was a long time before he could be persuaded so much as to enter the theatre with which his whole life had been connected. It was for the opening of this new Drury Lane that the competition of Opening Addresses was called for by the new proprietors, which has been made memorable by the "Rejected Addresses" of Horace and James Smith, one of the few burlesques which have taken a prominent place in literature. It was a tradesmanlike idea to propose such a competition to English poets, and the reader will willingly excuse the touch of bitterness in Sheridan's witty description of the Ode contributed by Whitbread himself, which, like most of the addresses, "turned chiefly on allusions to the phoenix." "But Whitbread made more of the bird than any of them," Sheridan said; "he entered into particulars and described its wings, beak, tail, etc.; in short, it was a poulterer's description."

It was while he was involved in these painful controversies and struggles that Sheridan lost his seat in Parliament. This was the finishing blow. His person, so long as he was a member of Parliament, was at least safe. He could not be arrested for debt; everything else that could be done had been attempted, but this last indignity was impossible. Now, however, that safeguard was removed; and for this among other reasons his exclusion from Parliament was to Sheridan the end of all things. His *prestige* was gone, his power over. It would seem to be certain that the Prince of Wales offered to bring him in for a Government borough; but Sheridan had not fallen so low as that. Once out of Parliament, however, the old lion was important to nobody. He could neither help to

pass a measure nor bring his eloquence to the task of smothering one. He was powerless henceforward in state intrigues, neither good to veil a prince's designs nor to aid a party movement. And, besides, he was a poor, broken-down, dissipated old man, a character meriting no respect, and for whom pity itself took a disdainful tone. He had not been less self-indulgent when the world vied in admiration and applause of him; but all his triumphs had now passed away, and what had been but the gay excess of an exuberant life became the disgraceful habit of a broken man. His debts, which had been evaded and put out of sight so often, sprang up around him, no more to be eluded. Once he was actually arrested and imprisoned in a sponging-house for two or three days, a misery and shame which fairly overcame the fortitude of the worn-out and fallen spirit. "On his return home," Moore tells us (some arrangements having been made by Whitbread for his release), "all his fortitude forsook him, and he burst into a long and passionate fit of weeping at the profanation, as he termed it, which his person had suffered." Leigh Hunt, in his flashy and frothy article, has some severe remarks upon this exhibition of feeling, but few people will wonder at it. Sheridan had been proud in his way; he had carried his head high. His own great gifts had won him a position almost unparalleled; he had been justified over and over again in the fond faith that by some happy chance, some half miraculous effort, his fortunes might still be righted and all go well. Alas! all this was over, hope and possibility were alike gone. Like a man running a desperate race, half stupefied in the rush of haste and weariness, of trembling limbs and panting bosom, whose final stumble overwhelms him with the passion of weakness, here was the point in which every horror

culminated and every power broke down. The sanguine, foolish bravery of the man was such even then that next moment he was calculating upon the possibility of re-election for Westminster, a seat which was one of the prizes sought by favourites of fortune; and, writing to his solicitor after his personal possessions, pictures, books, and nick-nacks, had been sacrificed, comforted him with a cheerful "However, we shall come through!"

Poor Sheridan! the heart bleeds to contemplate him in all his desperate shifts, now maudlin in tears, now wild in foolish gaiety and hope. Prince and party alike left him to sink or swim as he pleased. When it was told him that young Byron, the new hero of society, had praised him as the writer of the best comedy, the best opera, the best oration of his time, the veteran burst into tears. A compliment now was an unwonted delight to one who had received the plaudits of two generations, and who had moved men's minds as few besides had been able to do. A little band of friends, very few and of no great renown, were steadfast to him—Peter Moore, M.P. for Coventry, Samuel Rogers, his physician, Dr. Bain, he who had attended the death-bed of Mrs. Sheridan—stood by him faithfully through all; but he passed through the difficulties of his later years, and descended into the valley of the shadow of death, deserted, but for them, by all who had professed friendship for him. Lord Holland, indeed, is said to have visited him once, and the Duke of Kent wrote him a polite, regretful letter when he announced his inability to attend a meeting; but not even an inquiry came from Carlton House, and all the statesmen whom he had offended, and those to whom he had long been so faithful a colleague, deserted him unanimously. When the troubles of his later life culminated in illness a more forlorn

being did not exist. He had worn out his excellent constitution with hard living and continual excesses. Oceans of potent port had exhausted his digestive organs; he had no longer either the elasticity of youth to endure, or its hopeful prospects to bear him up. He was, indeed, still cheerful, sanguine, full of plans and new ideas for "getting through," till the very end. But this had long been a matter beyond hope. His last days were harassed by all the miseries of poverty—nay, by what is worse, the miseries of indebtedness. That he should starve was impossible; but he had worse to bear, he had to encounter the importunities of creditors whom he could not pay, some at least of whom were perhaps as much to be pitied as himself. He was not safe night nor day from the assaults of the exasperated or despairing. "Writs and executions came in rapid succession, and bailiffs at length gained possession of his house." That house was denuded of everything that would sell in it, and the chamber in which he lay dying was threatened, and in one instance at least invaded by sheriff's officers, who would have carried him off wrapped in his blankets, had not Dr. Bain interfered, and warned them that his life was at stake. One evening Rogers, on returning home late at night, found a despairing appeal on his table. "I find things settled so that £150 will remove all difficulty; I am absolutely undone and broken-hearted. I shall negotiate for the plays successfully in the course of a week, when all shall be returned. They are going to put the carpets out of the window and break into Mrs. S.'s room and *take* me. For God's sake let me see you." Moore was with Rogers, and vouches for this piteous demand on his own authority. The two poets turned out after midnight to Sheridan's house, and spoke over the area rails to a servant, who as-

sured them that all was safe for the night. Miserable crisis so often repeated! In the morning the money was sent by the hands of Moore, who gives this last description of the unfortunate and forsaken:

“I found Mr. Sheridan good-natured and cordial, and though he was then within a few weeks of his death his voice had not lost its fulness or strength, nor was that lustre for which his eyes were so remarkable diminished. He showed, too, his usual sanguineness of disposition in speaking of the price he expected for his dramatic works, and of the certainty he felt of being able to manage all his affairs, if his complaint would but suffer him to leave his bed.”

Moore adds, with natural indignation, that during the whole of his lingering illness “it does not appear that any one of his noble or royal friends ever called at his door, or even sent to inquire after him.”

At last the end came. When the Bishop of London, sent for by Mrs. Sheridan, came to visit the dying man, she told Mr. Smyth that such a paleness of awe came over his face as she could never forget. He had never taken time or thought for the unseen, and the appearance of the priest, like a forerunner of death itself, stunned and startled the man whose life had been occupied with far other subjects. But he was not one to avoid any of the decent and becoming preliminaries that custom had made indispensable—nay, there was so much susceptibility to emotion in him, that no doubt he was able to find comfort in the observances of a death-bed, even though his mind was little accustomed to religious thought or observance. Nothing more squalid, more miserable and painful, than the state of his house outside of the sick-chamber could be. When Smyth arrived in loyal friendship and pity to see his old patron he found the desecrated place in possession of bailiffs, and everything in the chill disorder which such

a miserable invasion produces. Poor Mrs. Sheridan, meeting him with a kind of sprightly despair, suggested that he must want food after his journey. "I dare say you think there is nothing to be had in such a house; but we are not so bad as that," she cried. The shocked and sympathetic visitor had little heart to eat, as may be supposed, and he was profoundly moved by the description of that pale awe with which Sheridan had resigned himself to the immediate prospect of death.

In the mean time, some one outside—possibly Moore himself, though he does not say so—had written a letter to the *Morning Post*, calling attention to the utter desertion in which Sheridan had been left:

"Oh, delay not!" said the writer, without naming the person to whom he alluded [we quote from Moore]—"delay not to draw aside the curtain within which that proud spirit hides its sufferings." He then adds, with a striking anticipation of what afterwards happened: "Prefer ministering in the chamber of sickness to mustering at

'The splendid sorrows that adorn the hearse.'

"I say *life* and *succour* against Westminster Abbey and a funeral. This article" [Moore continues] "produced a strong and general impression, and was reprinted in the same paper the following day."

So unusual a fact proves the interest which Sheridan still called forth in the public mind. It had so much effect that various high-sounding names were heard again at Sheridan's door among the hangers-on of the law and the disturbed and terrified servants, who did not know when an attempt might be made upon their master's person, dying or dead. The card even of the Duke of York, the inquiries of peers or wealthy commoners, to whom it would have been so easy to conjure all Sheridan's assailants away, could no longer help or harm him. After a

period of unconsciousness, on a Sunday in July, in the height of summer and sunshine, this great ministrant to the amusement of the world, this orator who had swayed them with his breath, died, like the holder of a besieged castle, safe only in the inmost citadel, beset with eager foes all ready to rush in, and faithful servants glad that he should hasten out of the world and escape the last indignity. Among the many lessons of the vicissitudes of life with which we are all familiar there never was any more effective. It is like one of the strained effects of the stage, to which Sheridan's early reputation belonged; and like a curious repetition of his early and sudden fame, or rather like the scornful commentary upon it of some devilish cynic permitted for the moment to scoff at mankind, is the apotheosis of his conclusion. The man who was hustled into his coffin to escape the touch which he had dreaded so much in life, that profanation of his person which had moved him to tears—and hastily carried forth in the night to the shelter of his friend's house, that he might not be arrested, dead—was no sooner covered with the funeral pall than dukes and princes volunteered to bear it. Two royal highnesses, half the dukes and earls and barons of the peerage, followed him in the guise of mourning to Westminster Abbey, where among the greatest names of English literature, in the most solemn and splendid shrine of national honour, this spendthrift of genius, this prodigal of fame, was laid for the first time in all his uneasy being to secure and certain rest. He had been born in obscurity—he died in misery. Out of the humblest, unprovided, unendowed poverty he had blazed into reputation, into all the results of great wealth, if never to its substance; more wonderful still, he had risen to public importance and splendour, and his name can



never be obliterated from the page of history; but had fallen again, down, down into desertion, misery, and the deepest degradation of a poverty for which there was neither hope nor help: till death wiped out all possibilities of further trouble or embarrassment, and Sheridan became once more in his coffin the great man whom his party delighted to honour—a national name and credit, one of those whose glory illustrates our annals. It may be permitted now to doubt whether these last mournful honours were not more than his real services to England deserved; but at the moment it was, no doubt, a fine thing that the poor, hopeless “Sherry” whom everybody admired and despised, whom no one but a few faithful friends would risk the trouble of helping, who had sunk away out of all knowledge into endless debts, and duns, and drink, should rise in an instant as soon as death had stilled his troubles into the Right Honourable, brilliant, and splendid Sheridan, whose enchanter’s wand the stubborn Pitt had bowed under, and the noble Burke acknowledged with enthusiasm. It was a fine thing; but the finest thing was that death, which in England makes all glory possible, and which restores to the troublesome bankrupt, the unfortunate prodigal, and all stray sons of fame, at one stroke, their friends, their reputation, and the abundant tribute which it might have been dangerous to afford them living, but with which it is both safe and prudent to glorify their tomb. So Scotland did to Burns, letting him suffer all the tortures of a proud spirit for want of a ten-pound note, but sending a useless train of local gentry to attend him to his grave—and so the Whig peers and potentates did to Sheridan, who had been their equal and companion. Such things repeat themselves in the history of the generations, but no one takes the lesson, though every one

comments upon it. Men of letters have ceased, to a great extent, to be improvident and spendthrifts, and seldom require to be picked out of ruin by their friends and disciples in these days; but who can doubt that, were there another Sheridan amongst us, his fate would be the same?

It has to be added, however, that had the great people who did nothing for him stepped in to relieve Sheridan and prolong his life, nothing is more probable than that the process would have had to be repeated from time to time, as was done for Lamartine in France, since men do not learn economy, or the wise use of their means, after a long life of reckless profusion. But he had gained nothing by his political career, in which most of the politicians of the time gained so much, and it is said that his liabilities came to no more than £4000, for which sum surely it was not meet to suffer such a man to be hunted to his grave by clamorous creditors, however just their claim or natural their exasperation. Somebody said, in natural enthusiasm, when it was announced that the author of *Waverley* was overwhelmed with debts, "Let every one to whom he has given pleasure give him sixpence, and he will be the richest man in Europe." Yes! but the saying remained a very pretty piece of good-nature and pleasing appreciation, no one attempting to carry its suggestion out. Sir Walter would have accepted no public charity, but a public offering on such a grand scale, had it ever been offered, would not have shamed the proudest. These things are easy to say; the doing only fails in our practical British race with a curious consistency. It is well that every man should learn that his own exertions are his only trust; but when that is said it is not all that there should be to say.

“Where were they, these royal and noble persons” [Moore cries, with natural fervour of indignation], “who now crowded to ‘partake the yoke’ of Sheridan’s glory; where were they all while any life remained in him? Where were they all but a few weeks before, when their interposition might have saved his heart from breaking? or when the zeal now wasted on the grave might have soothed and comforted the death-bed? This is a subject on which it is difficult to speak with patience. If the man was unworthy of the commonest offices of humanity while he lived, why all this parade of regret and homage over his tomb?”

And he adds the following verses which “appeared,” he says, “at the time, and, however intemperate in their satire and careless in their style, came evidently warm from the breast of the writer” (himself) :

“Oh! it sickens the heart to see bosoms so hollow,  
And friendships so false in the great and high-born;  
To think what a long line of titles may follow  
The relics of him who died friendless and lorn.

“How proud they can press to the funeral array  
Of him whom they shunned in his sickness and sorrow;  
How bailiffs may seize his last blanket to-day,  
Whose pall shall be held up by nobles to-morrow.”

When all these details which move the heart out of the composedness of criticism are put aside we scarcely feel ourselves in a position to echo the lavish praises which have been showered upon Sheridan. He was no conscientious workman labouring his field, but an abrupt and hasty wayfarer snatching at the golden apples where they grew, and content with one violent abundance of harvesting. He had no sooner gained the highest successes which the theatre could give than he abandoned that scene of triumph for a greater one; and when—on that more glorious stage—he had produced one of the

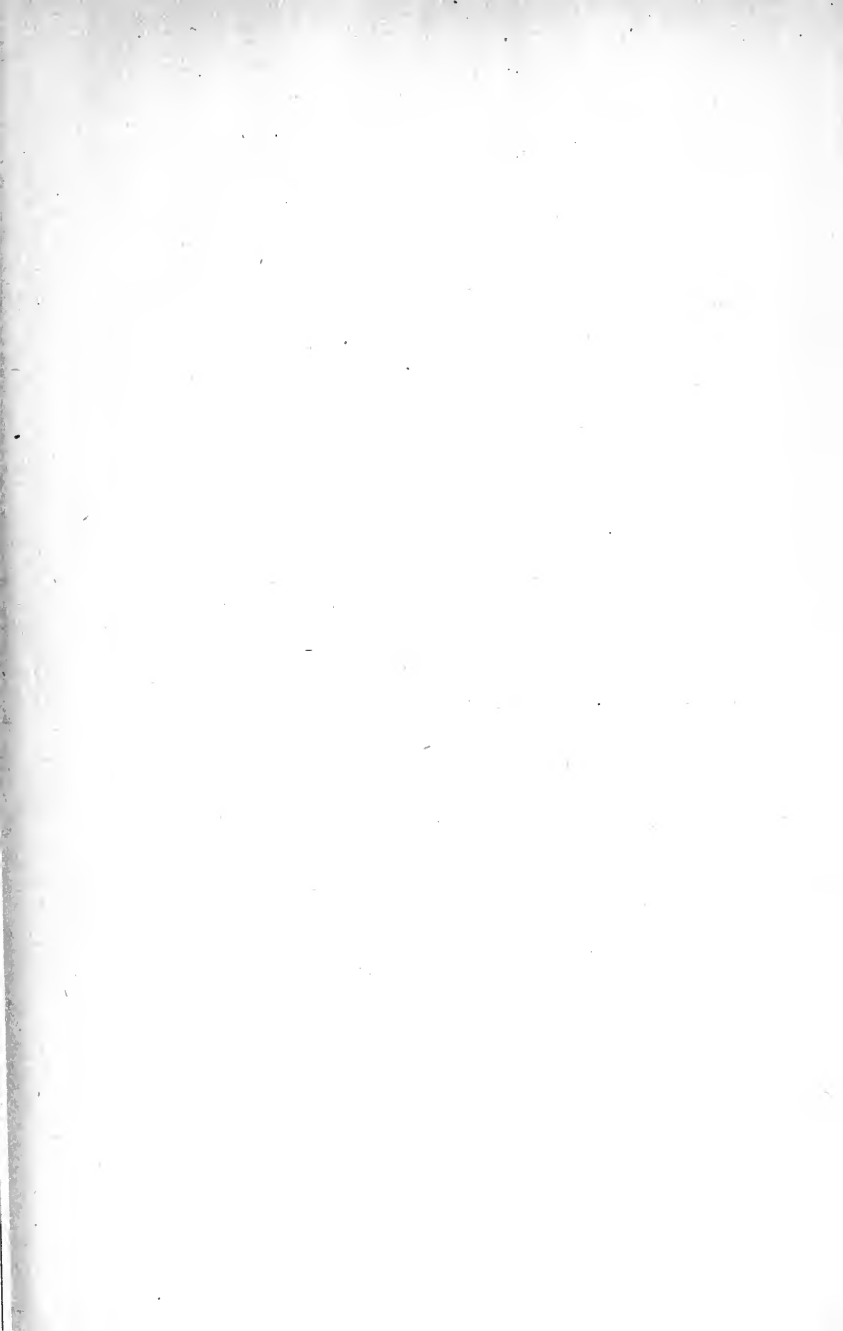
most striking sensations known to English political life, his interest in that also waned, and a broken, occasional effort now and then only served to show what he might have accomplished had it been continuous. If he had been free of the vices that pulled him to earth, and possessed of the industry and persistency which were not in his nature, he would, with scarcely any doubt, have left both fortune and rank to his descendants. As it was in everything he did, he but scratched the soil. Those who believe that the conditions under which a man does his work are those which are best adapted to his genius will comfort themselves that there was nothing beyond this fertile surface, soon exhausted and capable of but one overflowing crop and no more, and there is a completeness and want of suggestion in his literary work which favours this idea. But the other features of his life are equally paradoxical and extraordinary; the remarkable financial operations which must have formed the foundation of his career were combined with the utmost practical deficiency in the same sphere; and his faculty for business, for negotiation, explanation, copious letter-writing, and statement of opinion, contrast as strangely with the absolute indolence which seems to have distinguished his life. He could conjure great sums of money out of nothing, out of vacancy, to buy his theatre, and set himself up in a lavish and prodigal life, but he could not keep his private affairs out of the most hopeless confusion. He could arrange the terms of a Regency and outwit a party, but he could not read, much less reply to, the letters addressed to him, or keep any sort of order in the private business on his hands. Finally, and perhaps most extraordinary of all, he could give in *The Critic* the deathblow to false tragedy, then write the bombast of *Rolla*, and prepare *Pizarro*

for the stage. Through all these contradictions Sheridan blazed and exploded from side to side in a reckless yet rigid course, like a gigantic and splendid piece of fire-work, his follies repeating themselves, his inability to follow up success, and careless abandonment of one way after another that might have led to a better and happier fortune. He had a fit of writing, a fit of oratory, but no impulse to keep him in either path long enough to make anything more than the dazzling but evanescent triumph of a day. His harvest was like a Southern harvest, over early, while it was yet but May; but he sowed no seed for a second ingathering, nor was there any growth or richness left in the soon exhausted soil.

Sheridan's death took place July 7, 1816, when he was nearly sixty-five, after more than thirty years of active political life. His boyish reputation, won before this began, has outlasted all that high place, extraordinary opportunity, and not less extraordinary success, could do for his name and fame.

THE END.









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